

**Thinking about Finnish heritage,
Living the American life**

**Ethnic identity and cultural heritage of third and
fourth generation Finnish Americans**

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Table of contents

1	Introduction	3
1.1	Historical context	3
1.2	Research background	6
1.3	Research problem	9
2	Anthropology of migration and identity	10
2.1	Symbolic and interpretive anthropology	10
2.1.1	Culture and meanings	10
2.1.2	Symbols	11
2.2	Heritage and ethnic identity	14
2.2.1	Identity	14
2.2.2	Heritage and ethnic identity	15
2.2.3	Assimilation, acculturation or integration?	20
3	Research material and methodology	23
3.1	Methods and data	23
3.2	Position of the researcher and research ethics	27
3.3	Processing and analysis of the data	30
4	Representing the Finnish American identity	32
4.1	Symbolic identity	32
4.1.1	Language	36
4.1.2	Food culture	42
4.2	Kinship	45
4.3	Material culture	51
4.3.1	Sauna	51
4.3.2	Artefacts	55
5	Understanding and defining Finnish American ethnic identity	63
5.1	Finnish, American or Finnish American?	63
5.2	Combining ethnic cultures	68
5.3	Ethnic identity as a process of definition	70
6	Maintaining the Finnish American heritage	76
6.1	Finnish American organizations and events	76
6.2	Finnish place names	85
7	Conclusion	89
	References	96
	Research material	96
	Interviews	96
	Other research data	97
	Unpublished references	97
	Published references	99
	Appendices	113

1 Introduction

1.1 Historical context

The United States has been a multiethnic and multicultural society throughout the history of the country. From the first colonies until today, most of the people in the USA have been immigrants or descendants of immigrants (Perez & Hirschman 2009: 2). Finnish immigration to North America started in 1641 to the then Swedish colony in present-day state of Delaware. Between 1600s and the beginning of 1800s the number of Finnish immigrants was small, most of them being sailors (Kero 1996). During the Great Migration between 1820 and 1930 about 37 million immigrants left from Europe to the USA (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 3). The greatest number of immigrants came from Germany, Britain, Ireland and Italy (e.g. Kero 2014: 43). In Finland the turning point for interest in emigration was in 1866, and about 389 000 immigrants left from Finland between 1870 and 1929. The largest wave of immigration from Finland was between 1899 and the First World War (Kero 2014: 41). Most of the people came from Ostrobothnia region with the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia being the heartland of emigration; from the province of Turku and Pori to the province of Oulu as well as inland to Saarijärvi, Viitasaari and Kiuruvesi (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 6; Kero 2014: 44). Between the Second World War and 2014 about 27 000 Finns immigrated to the USA (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 7).

In 1800s the population of Europe expanded, causing a big immigration wave. There was too much labor in Europe but in North America mines, factories, agriculture and forestry demanded laborers (Kero 1996). Push-factors for European immigrants were slow industrialization and rapid growth in population. In Finland the farms were small and usually inherited

by the oldest son while the other children in the family had to find work somewhere else. Those children had little opportunity to owning their own farm because nearly all arable land was already in use. (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 4-6.) Thus, most of the immigrants from Finland were peasants and laboring people; farmers' children, cottagers (*torppari*) and workers (Kero 2014: 41, 47). In North America, immigrant pulling factors were need for labor, high wages and free land as well as the idea of the USA as Promised Land of equality, freedom and prosperity, especially during the Russification years (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 3, 6). In the USA, wages were so much better that a miner could earn five times more than a farm worker in Finland (Kero 1989: 14). Most of the emigrants before and in 1950s were searching for better job opportunities but after 1960s also marriage and studies have many times been the reasons of immigration (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 7). One fifth of the immigrants of the Great Migration period returned to Finland after working in the USA for a couple of year (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 42).

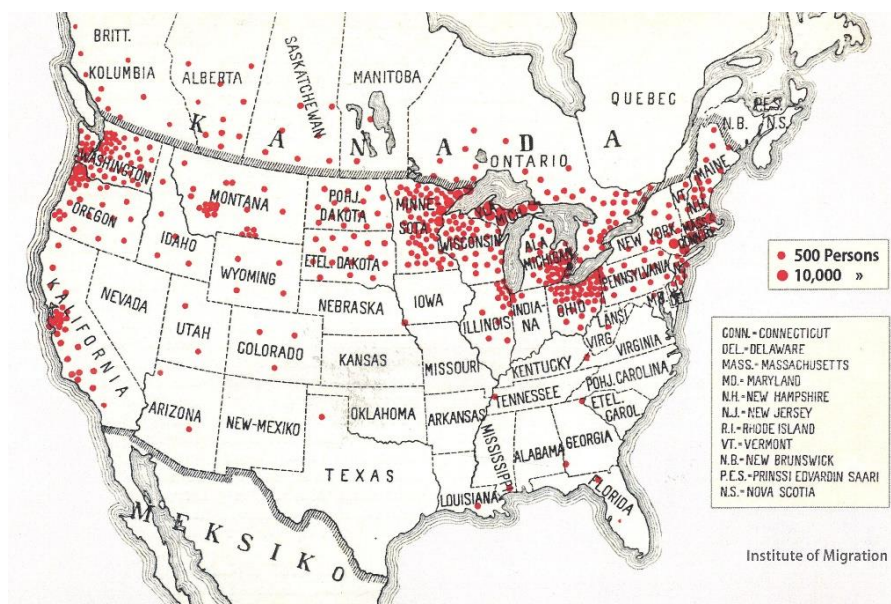


Figure 1. Map of Finnish Americans in the United States (Korkiasaari et.al. 2015: 40).

Most of the Finns went to the states and provinces near the American-Canadian border (figure 1). In the USA most Finns — about 65 per cent — moved to the states of Minnesota, Michigan, New York, Massachusetts and Washington (Kero 2014: 44). Minnesota and Michigan were the most important areas for Finns to settle. A lot of Finns moved to the area around Hancock, Michigan which is known as the Copper Country due to the many copper mines in the area. The Copper Country was — and still is by some people — even called the Lapland of America (*Amerikan Lappi*) because so many Finns settled there and the landscape resembles Northern Finland (Kero 1989: 15). After arriving in their destination the immigrants often moved to areas where other Finns already lived. In many areas Finns established their own farm countries, villages and city communities — Finntowns — where people could get by entirely in Finnish (Korkiasaari et al 2015: 40). The largest Finntowns were in New York City's Harlem and Brooklyn.

Women found work as maids and servants for wealthy American families, or cleaners, cooks and waitresses in hotels and restaurants. Women also worked in factories and boarding houses near mining, logging or construction sites. In 1800s men relatively commonly started as settlers but in 1900s most men's first job in the USA was in a mine, a forest site or sawmill. Men found jobs also in factories, construction and fishing. Working in the mines was dangerous and many eventually changed over to farming. (Korkiasaari 2015: 43.) A small number of Finnish immigrants started out as small-scale businessmen as grocers, restaurant or sauna owners and barkeepers. The most successful businesses were co-ops; dairies, mixed-good stores and insurance companies. (Korkiasaari 2015: 44.)

Finns had many own associations in which people attended actively. Ideological and cultural activities were offered by the church, worker's associations, co-operative movement and temperance societies (Korkiasaari 2015: 45; Kero 1989: 15). Finns had their own religious organizations and churches. The

biggest churches were the Evangelical Lutheran Suomi Synod which had close ties to the mother church in Finland, and the Laestadian Apostolic Lutheran church (Korkiasaari 2015: 45). Suomi Synod founded its own theological seminary and college called Suomi College (*Suomi-Opisto*) in Hancock, Michigan in 1896. The school changed its name to Finlandia University in 2000 and it is the only higher educational institute in North America that was founded by Finnish immigrants (Finlandia University 2019a). Finnish Americans also had many printing presses that produced a wide selection of newspapers, books, pamphlets and other publications in Finnish and in English (Korkiasaari 2015: 45-46). There are not many Finnish American newspapers left, but keeping the Finnish American newspaper printing tradition going, the most widely circulated Finnish American newspaper is the Finnish American Reporter, published in Hancock, Michigan (Finnish American Reporter 2019).

Finnish organizations were mostly first and second generation Finns' activities and they did not transfer to the following generations. First generation immigrants could spend their lives in Finntowns speaking Finnish or Finglish — a mix of English words with Finnish grammatical framework — but second and third generation Finnish Americans went to English speaking schools and became more assimilated to the American main culture. (Korkiasaari 2015: 48; Alanen 2012: 11.) Nevertheless, in the areas where most Finns settled, Finnishness can still be seen in heritage museums, in place names, on street signs and in buildings such as Finnish halls and churches (Korkiasaari 2015: 48).

1.2 Research background

My interest in researching Finnish American ethnic identity and the meanings of Finnish heritage to Finnish Americans is rooted in an academic interest in researching cultures, ethnicities and immigration of different groups of people but also in my own

family history. My great-grandfather immigrated to the United States in 1904 but returned to Finland in 1918. Three of his sisters and also relatives on my great-grandmother's side immigrated to the USA where their descendants are still living across the North American continent. In 2004 I visited my American cousins for the first time in Washington State. During that visit I noticed that in some areas the Nordic heritage is still very visible; for example some stores sell crisp rye bread or gingerbread cookies and fly the flags of the Nordic countries.

Relatives on my great-grandmother's side of the family have family reunion every five years where there have also been cousins from North America attending. In the 2015 reunion there were only two people from the USA, compared to 2000 when about 20 relatives from the USA came to attend. I wondered, why fewer American cousins are travelling to the reunion now. Is it due to the older, second generation Finnish Americans being too old to travel or is it because younger generations are not interested in going to Finland to see their distant cousins? Even though — according to my observations — many descendants of immigrants want to keep contact with their Finnish, sometimes quite distant relatives. I became interested in this topic and wanted to find out, what is the significance of Finnish heritage and Finnish ancestry to Finnish Americans in 2010s, and how third and fourth generation Finnish Americans represent their ethnic identity, or do they want to maintain their heritage?

Keeping contact with friends and relatives in geographically distant countries and different continents is much easier now with social media and emails. In social media there are also many interest groups that people can join. For example, there are Finnish American groups where people share photos, their thoughts about their heritage or use it as a way of keeping in contact with people from the same ethnic group. Genealogy is also quite popular nowadays and doing genealogical research has become much easier and more accessible after many records have been digitalized. There are also websites that people can use to

create their family trees and in that way find family connections and information about their ancestry (e.g. Ancestry 2019; Familysearch 2019). In 2010s DNA-testing is becoming more accessible and affordable. DNA-tests give people an opportunity to find out where their ancestors possibly were geographically from. These new methods of finding information about a person's ancestors and heritage may have an impact on how interested also Finnish Americans are in their cultural heritage and ancestors.

There have been a lot of research on Finnish immigrants. However, most of the research has focused on the history of Finnish immigration to the USA and other countries. In Finland the Institute of Migration has published many articles and books about emigration from Finland (e.g. Kero 1974; Lammervo 2009; Heikkilä & Koikkalainen 2011). Although a lot of research have been done, it has mostly been historical or linguistic research (e.g. Holmio 2001[1967]; Kero 1974; Alanen 2012; Rankinen 2014). Korkiasaari & Roinila (2005) conducted a survey-based research using quantitative statistical analysis in 1999-2000 of Finnish Americans' ethnic identity. In 2010s Finnish American culture has been visible also in the media in Finland. For example, there have been newspaper articles about Finnish Americans (e.g. Saarikoski 2017; Kalliokoski 2013), as well as documentaries and television programs on contemporary Finnish Americans and the history of immigration and Finnish Americans (e.g. Antti Holma ja maastamuuttajat 2017; Co-operatively yours 2017). Historical novels about the Finnish immigrants' experiences in North America have also been recently written (e.g. Tolonen 2018). There is not much anthropological or ethnographic research done recently about Finnish Americans. That is why more research about Finnish American culture is needed and with my research I am responding to this need of anthropological research.

1.3 Research problem

In this thesis the general aim is to examine the Finnish American ethnic identity and the presence of Finnish ethnicity and cultural heritage among third and fourth generation Finnish Americans in 2010s. I refer to Finnish Americans in this research as people who were born in the USA and who have at least one immigrant ancestor from Finland. I am focusing on the Finnish Americans whose grandparents or great-grandparents emigrated from Finland to the USA in the end of 1800s or beginning of 1900s. Therefore, all my informants are third or fourth generation Finnish Americans. My research questions are:

1. How do Finnish Americans represent their Finnish American ethnic identity? What kind of symbols are used to represent the Finnish heritage? What kind of role do language and food culture play in representing ethnic identity? What is the part of kinship in ethnic identity? How do people represent their ethnic identity through material objects?

2. How do Finnish Americans understand and define their ethnic heritage and identity? How do Finnish Americans compare their nationality to their ethnicity? Is being Finnish American something to take pride in or something to be ashamed of? Does it resonate positive or negative feelings? How has the Finnish American culture been influenced by other ethnic cultures? Has the definition of what is Finnish changed in different phases of people's lives? Does geographical location has an impact on the understanding ethnic heritage?

3. How do Finnish Americans construct and maintain their Finnish American identity? How are Finnish heritage and ancestry visible in the lives of Finnish Americans? What kind of events there are in the Finnish American communities? How is the Finnish American influence visible in place names?

2 Anthropology of migration and identity

2.1 Symbolic and interpretive anthropology

2.1.1 Culture and meanings

The basis of my theoretical framework for this study is in symbolic and interpretive anthropology. Symbolic anthropology sees cultures as a shared systems of meaning which we can understand only in their historical and social context. Culture is embedded in people's interpretation of events and things around them. Thus, symbolic anthropology perceives cultural reality as constructed. (Stevens 2006: 2149; McGee & Warms 2012: 438.) Culture consists of ways of doing things that are acquired, learned and constructed — that are not innate to a newborn child (Rapport & Overing 2007: 109). According to Geertz (1973: 5) culture is a web of meaning that is constructed of different systems of meanings and social expressions. To Geertz (1973: 12), culture is public because the meanings are public. Social interaction happens within this web of meanings (Fornäs 1998). Geertz (1973: 12) uses winking of an eye as an example. If a person does not know what a wink means, they will not understand what the person winking is trying to communicate. In that case, the wink may be understood as something wrong in the winker's eye. Therefore, the meaning of the wink must be known to understand it. Because culture is public, the people representing the culture know what the wink of an eye means.

Geertz (1973: 6-7, 10) describes anthropological and ethnographic research as creating contacts, mapping the research field, selecting informants, interviewing, observing rituals, collecting kin terms and keeping a journal. Research is not, however, just that, but trying to write a detailed *thick description*. According to Geertz *thin description* tells what somebody is doing, but thick description tells what kind of meanings the

activity has. By means of thick description anthropologist aims to give as exact and lively description of different sides of the culture as they can (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 106). Geertz sees ethnography as thick description. He thinks that ethnographic research is like trying to read a script that is foreign, faded, incoherent, and full of abbreviations, corrections and opinionated commentaries. It is not written in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior. (Geertz 1973: 10.) Anthropologist's task is to understand this script and interpret it. According to Sintonen (1999: 49) Geertz is saying that thick description is describing the symbolism included in the activity in a way that the context of understanding the activity is also described.

It is not possible to go inside the informants' heads to hear their thoughts, but with thick description the researcher tries to guess what it would feel to be part of the society. According to Erickson & Murphy (2017: 131) the meanings that Geertz is telling about are not locked to the minds of different persons, but to the web of meanings that are public presentations. The rituals of the society are symbolic texts that are collectively shared with members of the society. The rituals are narratives that the members tell about themselves. (Erickson & Murphy 2017: 132.) Geertzian anthropology assumes that important symbols have many levels of meaning. In thick description anthropologist tries to analyze every level of meaning — like peeling an onion — layer by layer. The most important is not in the middle but all of the layers. The same applies to culture with its different layers of meaning. (McGee & Warms 2012: 439.)

2.1.2 Symbols

Symbols are important for understanding cultural meaning. Symbols are — in their most simple usage — things or actions that represent some other thing or action (Stevens 2006: 2149). Symbols are a means of transmitting meanings, and what is

important is how symbols affect people's perception of the world and how symbols act as intermediate of culture (Geertz 1973; Berger & Luckmann 1994: 46; McGee & Warms 2012: 438). Symbols are signs that represent some kind of meaning to people in a specific context. Symbols are also connecting factors because they connect people who share the same understanding of the same meanings (Fornäs 1998: 180). Symbols are objects, movement, sounds and words that represent something to people. However, symbols do not always mean the same to everybody, but depending on the context, symbols can be interpreted differently. Culture is not only in the mind of a person, it becomes apparent in the life of a society in a symbolic form (Geertz 1973; Collings 2006: 156). According to Boon (1986: 240) symbols appear in culture's diverse performances that people present. Culture is an ongoing output of that performance interpreted by the members of the culture and researchers.

According to Cohen (2001: 16) symbolic tools can be compared to vocabulary of a language. Cohen argues that learning vocabulary and language gives an opportunity to communicate with other people but it does not tell what to communicate. The same can be applied to symbols. Symbols do not tell what to mean but they give an ability to make meanings. Culture that is composed of symbols does not command people to have the same experience, but if they do, it happens because they use the same symbols. The members of the society think that they are connected by some universal or specific meaningful way that separates them from the others. Thus, the reality of the society in people's experience is in their attachment and commitment to shared symbols. The symbols of Finnish culture and heritage — flags, words, artefacts and so forth — create collective experience of Finnish ethnic identity if the members of the society uses the symbols and the meanings of those symbols are shared. Therefore, the symbols represent Finnish heritage to the people who have Finnish ancestors and those symbols become meaningful in representing Finnish culture to them.

Being a member of a society or a community is symbolic and it has different meanings to every person of the community (Cohen 2001: 18-19). For some it can be a group that differs from others and for others something that a person is born into — their kin. The community is in the minds of its members, but also its individuality and real boundaries are in the minds of the members, in those meanings that people relate to the community. The reality of the community is manifested symbolically. (Cohen 2001: 98.) In other words, symbolism is what nationalities are made of (Kertzer 1988: 6). Nationality and ethnic groups can be described as imagined communities. Imagined community is a group of people of a state or nationality that have a sense of belonging to the same group of people, even though they have not met — nor will meet — all of the community's members (Anderson 1991: 6). Members of an ethnic group — in this case Finnish Americans — feel that they are part of the Finnish American community even though they will never meet, see or speak to most of the members of the community, yet in the mind of the people is the image of their communion. Therefore, real interaction does not determine a community or nationality, but the collective images and narratives that construct and maintain the national identity (Anderson 1991). Ethnic and national identities are constructions; they are not given and are expressed primarily in interaction with others (Wiltgren 2014: 308). The symbols convey associations in both communicative and non-verbal ways, thereby allowing people to create stories about themselves through their use of images which they give symbolic meanings and value. In this way, people produce and reproduce the nation in their everyday lives. The symbols show that the people are proud of their associations and wish to convey them visually, openly and publically. (Wiltgren 2014: 321.)

The Finnish American community exists symbolically in the minds of the community members and through the meanings of the symbols. People attach certain symbols to their community that they think are meaningful. A flag is not merely a piece of fabric with certain colors but an embodiment of nationality and a

meaningful symbol of the community (Kertzer 1988: 7). National symbols — for example flags, coat of arms, national hymns or national flowers — are common emblems and symbols which unite, and at the same time express and guide national identification and nationalism (Klinge 1999: 288). For example the Finnish flag is a powerful symbol of nationality and ethnicity to many Finnish Americans. To Finnish people the flag is a representation of Finland as an independent country, a part of the Finnish identity and the national mindscape. The colors are considered national colors and symbols of the national identity of Finland. (Ministry of the Interior 2018.) Flags represent the country and heritage where the group has come from (Susag 1998: 4).

2.2 Heritage and ethnic identity

2.2.1 Identity

Identity is who a person, a social group or a community think they are. Identity is belonging to something, a feeling of having something in common with a group of people, but also what separates them from other groups of people (Weeks 1990: 88). Identity is fairly stable and temporarily persistent, and it also contains person's own interpretation and definition of themselves (Sevänen 2004a: 6). Every person has many identities that can sometimes be contradictory; am I male or female, dark-skinned or light-skinned, heterosexual or homosexual, or something in between; or am I Finnish or American, and what is my ethnicity if my parents have different ethnicities. What is most important and what we bring forward — that is, what we identify as — depends on many variables. In the center of our identity are the values that we share with others (Weedon 2004: 1). A person is in interaction with other people. Therefore, a person's identity is constructed in social processes and it is formed and reformed in social interactions (Berger & Luckmann 1994: 195).

Culture is a shared system of meanings that the people belonging to the community, group or nationality use to understand the world around them. Hall (2003: 85) thinks that these meanings are not freely floating ideas but a part of our material and social world. Culture includes the social practices that create meanings as well as practices that control and organize shared meanings. Culture consists of symbols and representations, and it constructs identities by creating meanings of nationality that we can relate to (Hall 1999: 47). By means of cultural gestures, symbols and customs identity becomes visible and understandable (Weedon 2004: 7). Shared system of meanings creates a feeling of belonging to the culture and creates a bond between the people; we feel like being part of the community and having a collective identity.

Identities are socially, culturally or institutionally determined (Weedon 2004: 6). Nationality and gender can be determined according to governmental institutions, or social and cultural customs and discourses. States have restrictions of who can have their passport and nationality. However, having the passport and citizenship of a country does not mean that the person has the identity of the nation. A person with a Finnish passport may not identify as a Finn, or a child of immigrant parents in the USA may identify as American, or have an identity of either one of their parents or identity of both of their parents' ethnicities. These kinds of characteristics become part of identity only when they are interpreted and become part of personal and social meaning, and when these meanings determine persons and groups. In other words, when people used them to answer the question who they are. (Vignoles et al. 2011: 2-3.)

2.2.2 Heritage and ethnic identity

Heritage is defined as something which comes from the circumstances of birth and the condition or state transmitted from ancestors (Oxford English Dictionary 2019a). With ancestors or

ancestry I refer to a person's relation to their ancestral lineage and descent or the progenitorship. Ancestor is defined as from whom a person is descended — either by father or mother — and it is usually said of those more remote than a grandfather or grandmother (Oxford English Dictionary 2019b). Perez and Hirschman (2009: 12) understand ancestry as the geographical origin — countries or regions — of a person's parents, grandparents or so on.

The Oxford English Dictionary states that heritage is inherited, such as property or land. However, I would add that in addition to material heritage there is also intangible heritage which is not in material objects or items. According to UNESCO (2019) intangible cultural heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills — including instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces — that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. In UNESCO's definition, the intangible cultural heritage is manifested in oral traditions and expressions, which includes language, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and universe, and traditional craftsmanship.

Ethnic minority is a group of people that is smaller in size compared to the population of a state, is not politically governing, and is considered an ethnic group (Eriksen 2010: 147-148). Minority groups only exist in comparison to the majority and vice versa. Emigrants may be the majority in their origin country but a minority in their new homeland; Finns are a majority in Finland but a minority in the USA. Ethnicity is a form of social relationship where the members of the group think they are culturally different from the other groups (Eriksen 2010: 10, 16-17; Sintonen 1999: 93; Jones 1997). Ethnicity is constructed in social contacts between people and groups because groups define themselves to us and them — to those who are part of their group and those who are not. According to Eriksen (2010: 23) there

would not be different ethnicities if such distinction to different groups did not exist.

Formerly ethnicity has been defined as a group of people that has mutual national or geographic origin or shared ancestry; same cultural customs, religion, language and race or other physical features; consciousness of community; institutions; majority or minority status; or they are a group of immigrants (Isajiw 1979). Ethnicity can be based on togetherness or — at least imagined — sameness that is based on common ancestry (Martikainen et al. 2006: 15). Ethnicity can be seen as a group of people that share a common biological ancestry and cultural attributes, and who are in social interaction within the group, who have coherent, recognizable identity, and who have a feeling of togetherness — however, ethnicity is based on more than biological attributes and imagined togetherness. (Barth 1969: 10-11; Martikainen et al. 2006: 15.)

Ethnic group is a symbolic community that does not require physical interaction, but instead shared cultural meanings and symbols are characteristic to the group (Niedermüller 1992: 112-113). People are not born with an ethnic identity, they are born into a context of national or ethnic group and the identity is formed and reformed with representations and in relation to it (Hall 1999: 46). According to Hall we know what it is to be part of a group — say Finnish or American — only by how the ethnicity is being represented as a certain group of meanings in our culture. Ethnicity is Anderson's (1991) imagined community because it is founded on the feeling of togetherness and imagined kinship.

It has been proposed that ethnicity can be understood as being primordial, instrumental or symbolic. Primordial ethnicity means the objective and subjective features that are explained to be caused by ancestry or genetics (Sintonen 1999: 103; Hautaniemi 2001: 19; Hall 2003: 92-93). Fundamental in primordialism is that ethnicity is captured in biology or psychology and those traits

are inherited and that the basis of the ethnic group is the common ancestral origin (Sintonen 1999: 104, 110). This limits the person's ethnic identity to only the ones that they have genetic connection to. Ethnic identity is not, however, only the result of genetics. Although primordial factors are thought to be involuntary and determining, they do not explain the change of identity in social contexts and between different people (Jones 1997). In anthropology, identity is thought to be constructed more in social processes instead of biological (Stepick et al. 2011: 875). Instrumental ethnicity means the special characteristics that people use to aim at something (Hautaniemi 2001: 20). These aims can be — for example — securing the rights of a person or justification of special measures. Instrumentalists argue that ethnicity is socially constructed and that people have the ability to cut and mix different ethnic heritages to create their own subjective identity.

Ethnic identity can also be constructed symbolically. Descendants of immigrants are socialized through the mainstream society, but have developed symbolic relationship with their ethnicity (Sintonen 1999: 132). Symbols of ethnic identity can be relatively uncommon aspects of culture; such as folk music or art. For example, national hymns, flags, costumes, holidays, rituals, museums, heritage and culture centers, and monuments help in construction and maintaining narratives of who we are and where we came from (Weedon 2004: 24). People do not necessarily adopt every aspect of the culture, instead people are selective of which cultural attributes they adopt. People can choose the features that best suit their life, needs or interests (Sintonen 1999: 132). For some people an important symbolic constructor of ethnic identity may be folk dancing, to others ethnic cuisine is important, or ethnicity becomes visible in different symbols in their homes. What is important to the modern ethnic identity of the Americans of immigrant descent is not the traditional criteria of ethnicity — such as speaking the language or endogamy — but recent histories and recently constructed or even invented

symbols and narratives of ethnic belonging (Čiubrinskas 2009: 89).

Cultural identities are complicated results of many cultural traditions and of mixing cultures and heritages (Hall 1999: 71). Hall thinks that immigrants have traces of their native land and culture — language, history and heritage — that they carry with them. Those traces are inherited by their descendants and used to construct ethnic identities. Descendants of immigrants have the opportunity to choose what they adopt as part of their ethnic identity and how they define it (Leinonen 2014a: 292). Immigrants and their descendants may adopt parts or certain attributes of the mainstream culture, such as language and some customs. Liebkind (1994: 24) argues that people do not identify to any group or culture in an either-or attitude, she says that only parts of culture is adopted while other parts are discarded. This means — for example — that a person wants to adopt customs and traditions of ancestors but they do not want to learn their language. For someone else the language might be a very important aspect of their ethnic heritage.

In these cases culture is seen as a supermarket from which anybody can choose parts that are best and most suitable for themselves and their lives (Matthews 2000). However, I argue that the choice is not completely free and people cannot pick whatever ethnicity they want. In this context, I refer to the choice of ethnicity as not having a free choice of any ethnicity they want, but as people being free to choose either of their parents' or grandparents' ethnicity or none of them. As Gans (2007: 99) also notes; when two people of different ethnic origin have children, those children can choose between the two parental identities or choose neither and identify as Americans, as many children of intermarriage do. There are limits to ethnic options and most people remain loyal to their parental ethnicity. Many Americans have multiple identities that reflect complex ancestral origins, tribal and communal associations, and varied ideological outlooks on ethnicity and culture. In general, people do not change their

ethnicities as a matter of fashion, but they may emphasize different aspects depending on the circumstances. For example, a person who identifies as Mexican among relatives might identify as Hispanic at work and as American when traveling overseas. (Perez & Hirschman 2009: 2.)

2.2.3 Assimilation, acculturation or integration?

When people immigrate to a new country, they will not only have a new place to live but also they will be surrounded by different cultures. With this, I am referring to changes in people's cultural identity when they move to a new country and stay there for a longer period of time or for the rest of their lives. Assimilation means that a person abandons their own culture and adopts mainstream culture instead (Berry et al. 1986; Berry & Sabatier 2011: 128). Assimilation refers to the cultural change in which people change their behavior and values so that they become similar to the other culture's customs and values (Rhoades 2006: 293). For example, immigrants and their descendants abandon their native culture and their ethnic identity and become members of the mainstream culture by changing their language, kinship system, religion and social system.

Acculturation is a process in which changes in a culture is happening when people adapt to the mainstream culture (Sam 2000). Acculturation changes people's values and actions when mainstream culture is being adopted (Smith & Guerra 2006: 283). Acculturation differs from assimilation because in acculturation the person's native culture is not abandoned entirely, instead it is adapted and combined with features from other cultures. Thus, a person chooses what they want to keep or abandon from their native culture and how much contact they want with the mainstream culture (Berry & Sabatier 2011: 128).

Ethnicity can also be a stigma (e.g. Eidheim 1971). There may be pressure to assimilate to the mainstream culture or historical

events cause stigma to a certain group of people. If ethnic cultures are stigmatized, immigrants or their children may be ashamed of their heritage and want to assimilate faster due to unwillingness to being different. Hansen's law (1938) states that — in general — the second generation of immigrants of any ethnicity reject their ethnic heritage due to its stigma, but the third generation finds their ethnicity again. The third generation is far enough from the difficulties to adjust of their parents and grandparents for them to be proud of their ethnic roots (Sintonen 1999: 122). Sintonen argues that ethnicity is not disappearing in America. Instead it is fragmented and it is expressed symbolically rather than in concrete interactions of people. People are less interested in cultural organizations and institutions, instead they are interested in their ethnic identity; the feeling of ethnic heritage and that identity can be felt and expressed in a way most suitable for themselves (Gans 1979: 6).

This has led to a different perspective in more recent anthropological research of cultural encounter. Recent theories and concepts dealing with immigrant assimilation recognize the growing importance of pluralism and multiculturalism in the USA (Frazier & Tetley-Fio 2010: 22). The concept of integration has been added to assimilation and acculturation (Stepick et al. 2011: 868). Integration is a process in which a person works toward becoming an integral part of the mainstream society, but at the same time maintaining and valuing the original cultural heritage (Šabec 2016:80; Unk 2018: 178; Berry 2007: 69). In that case, they want to maintain at least parts of ethnic culture while acting as a member of the majority culture (Berry & Sabatier 2011: 128). Integration does not, therefore, indicate the abandonment of ethnic culture but mixing of cultural attributes. Immigrants and their descendants do not abandon their ethnic culture and identity — as assumed in assimilation theories — but combine a mix of cultures best suited for their own lives.

Integration has been described as a middle ground between multiculturalism and assimilation. It has focused on immigrants'

full participation in the labor market and their formal citizenship, but left matters of social membership and cultural preferences open to personal choice. (Erdal & Oeppen 2013: 869.) Assimilation refers to a passive acceptance of the new culture and habits of the adoptive country, and a complete abandonment of immigrants' old culture, which is rarely the case. Instead, they develop new bicultural identities that are able to blend together the different cultural values of the two countries. Therefore, transculturalism and transnationalism are better fit to define the adjustment process of the immigrants. (Unk 2018: 178.) Identity is not seen any more as unchangeable, but something that can be reconstructed depending on the situation, and it can be multilayered and hybrid (Kovács 2011: 122).

Immigrants have developed new bicultural identities and they live their lives and are involved in more than one nation, making both ethnic and mainstream cultures part of their lived social world (Petraza 2005: 422-423). Immigrants and their descendants may continue to maintain connections with their co-ethnics elsewhere and with the homeland itself through ethnic community organizations and diasporic networks spanning continents, thus creating transnational ethnic identities and communities in the process (Ang 2011: 84). If immigrants and their descendants are no longer satisfied with being just Americans, they can find new meaning in identifying themselves as members of their ancestors' ethnicity (Ang 2011: 90) — such as Finnish American, German American or Chinese American.

3 Research material and methodology

3.1 Methods and data

This research is ethnographic. The data collected for this research is qualitative and the data collection methods that I was using are interviews and participant observation. Ethnography is above all learning by doing and taking part in cultural activities, interacting with people, listening to what is talked about, and asking questions (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 106; O'Reilly 2009: 3). Ethnographic data is collected by means of social communication (Gould 2016: 12). Ethnographic knowledge of the social world comes from being part of people's daily activities and the immersion to the context — the culture that is researched, gaining trust of informants and their stories, interpretations and understanding of the complexity of the social world (O'Reilly 2012: 11; Kananen 2014: 83). Ethnography focuses on the everyday actions of people, which makes visual data of the research phenomena important (Puuronen 2007: 102-103). Thus, ethnography includes the documentation of people's behavior, actions and events (Pelto 2013: 23). Ethnographic fieldwork is a special method of getting in closer contact with the informants. Anthropological research underlines the perspectives of informants (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 16). The focus is in emic perspective which emphasizes the community's and informants' point of view (Barrett 2009: 77).

I conducted fieldwork in the USA in 2016 and 2018 (figure 2). The time spent on field was in total eight months; one month in May 2016 and seven months from April until October 2018. In 2016 I visited Massachusetts and the Pacific Northwest of the USA to conduct interviews and participant observation. In 2018 I was working as an intern for six months from beginning of April to the end of September in the Finnish American Historical Archives which is located in the Finnish American Heritage

Center at Finlandia University in Hancock, Michigan. During those six months I was living in the community, doing participant observation in different kinds of Finnish American events, meeting Finnish Americans and interviewing them. In October 2018 I travelled for a month on the west coast of the USA doing observations — mainly in Washington. Most of the interviews were gathered in 2016 in Washington and most of the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in 2018 in the Midwest in Michigan and Minnesota.



Figure 2. Map of the United States (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) with fieldwork areas added by researcher (United States Map 2019).

Major part of ethnographic research is to go out to the field close to people and their activities and daily experiences. Essential in participant observation is that the researcher joins the daily activities, rituals and interactions in the community and acts actively with the informants in order to learn performed and non-verbal routines of life and culture. (Musante 2015: 251; Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 99-100; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 94-95.) During

my fieldwork I kept a research journal of my observations and experiences. Field journal focuses on experiences on field and reflection of observations, it is a tool for documenting what has been done, active planning of research process and critical reflection (Kurki 2010: 161). The journal is not kept according to a predetermined schedule, but as a daily entries of open sentences, quotation, notes, observations and concerns (Emerson et al. 2010: 355). The journal also includes notes of what the researcher sees or hears, names of potential informants or other contacts, and notes of observations (O'Reilly 2012: 102). I used a small notebook to keep my journal but I also used my smart phone to write small notes and quotations.

Interviews are common in ethnographic research because informants' own viewpoints and opinions are the aim of ethnographic research (O'Reilly 2012: 120). The purpose of interviews is to understand people's actions and to gain knowledge of what people are thinking (Kananen 2014: 88-89). The interviews for this research were semi-structured focused interviews. In focused interviews the themes to talk about are chosen in advance (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 87). The interviews are fairly informal conversations between the researcher and the informant, but the interview questions and themes guiding the conversation topics (Eskola 2007: 33). The themes that I had for the interviews were Finland, language, identity and Finnish heritage (appendix 1). During the interview I also asked more defined questions or explanations to ensure that the informant understood the questions or if the conversation meandered off topic. The background questions were more structured, and in the beginning of every interview I wanted to direct the informant to the interview topic by asking a more open-ended question of their family history.

For this research I interviewed eleven Finnish Americans who are all citizens of the USA (table 1). Five of them were women and six were men. The interviews were in English. All of them were third or fourth generation Finnish Americans; meaning that their

grandparents or great-grandparents emigrated from Finland to the USA. One of the informants was second generation on their father's side and third generation on their mother's side. The youngest of the informants was in her 20s and the oldest in his 90s. Most of the informants are in their early 60s or 70s. Seven of the informants are living in the northwest of the USA, three in the Midwest and one in northeastern USA.

Table 1. Background of informants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age group</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Generation Finnish American</i>	<i>Speaks Finnish</i>	<i>Has visited Finland</i>
<i>Chris</i>	30-34	Idaho	Fourth	No	No
<i>Jessica</i>	20-24	Michigan	Third	Somewhat	Yes
<i>John</i>	90-94	Washington	Third/Second	Fluently	Yes
<i>Linda</i>	65-69	Massachusetts	Third	No	No
<i>Mary</i>	60-64	Idaho	Third	No	No
<i>Michael</i>	70-74	Washington	Third	No	Yes
<i>Richard</i>	70-74	Washington	Third	Somewhat	Yes
<i>Sarah</i>	30-34	Michigan	Fourth	No	No
<i>Sharon</i>	70-74	Washington	Third	No	Yes
<i>Thomas</i>	60-64	Michigan	Third	Somewhat	Yes
<i>William</i>	60-64	Washington	Third	No	No

I used my social networks — friends and relatives — to find informants. Some of the informants I knew already before starting the fieldwork because they are my distant cousins; my great-great-grandfather was their grandfather's brother. The informants that I did not have family relation with, I met by chance or social connections during fieldwork. Three of the informants were interviewed in their homes, one in my summer cabin in Finland, one in a university library in Finland and one at the Finnish American Heritage Center. Sharon and Michael were interviewed

together in Sharon's home. Linda's interview was more of a conversation while she was driving me around her hometown and showing the old Finntowns and other important places for her and the Finnish American community of that area. Mary, Chris and Thomas were interviewed via email due to time restrictions during my fieldwork.

I attended many Finnish American events in Michigan, Minnesota and Washington during my fieldwork periods. In two events — one in Minnesota and one in Michigan — I was invited as a guest speaker to share my views of Finnish America and my experience working and living in the Finnish American community. Some of the events were informal get-togethers of friends, family or co-workers, while others were public events, such as Midsummer or Memorial Day events, or public Finnish music concerts or movie screenings. I was also able to observe in a Finnish language and culture class in an elementary school in Michigan. I also visited museums and heritage centers in Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota and Washington, and I had a chance to talk to people working in those places while visiting. When I attended the events and activities I also took photographs to record my observations.

3.2 Position of the researcher and research ethics

Ethnographers work with people, often prying into people's innermost secrets, sacred rites, achievements, and failures making ethnographic descriptions usually detailed and revealing. Such descriptions may jeopardize individuals. (Fetterman 2010: 133, 146.) That is why anthropologists must take into consideration the ethics of conducting research; what is the role of the researcher, how the research affects the informants and the community, and how their anonymity is maintained if it is needed.

Being a Finn myself gave me a good opportunity to get in contact with Finnish Americans and being accepted as a part of the

community. A big advantage was to be working at the Finnish American Heritage Center and Finlandia University because a lot of Finnish American activities and events in the area happen around the university. That being said, I must note that the Finnish American Heritage Center and Finlandia University did not take part in planning and conducting my research. But they did have an influence on the research, because working there gave me an excellent opportunity to get in close contact with the Finnish American community and to see how some of the events are organized. I would not have had so many opportunities to meet Finnish Americans if I had not been working as an intern at the heritage center.

The background of the researcher affects how and where the study can be conducted. Everyone has their cultural context which they cannot detach themselves from, even when conducting research (Suojanen 1997: 154). Researcher's age, gender or ethnicity can have an effect on how the researcher is accepted and welcomed and who they can meet and interview. I think that my research topic is not so sensitive that the fieldwork was considerably influenced by my age or gender. I consider my ethnicity — being Finnish — more influencing to the research because it helped me getting contacts and informants in the Finnish American community.

My experience as a person from Finland doing fieldwork in the USA has been only positive and all of the Finnish Americans that I interacted with were happy to meet a person from Finland. Though, all my informants and most of the people that I have interacted with are people who have positive thoughts about having Finnish ancestors. The reception would have been different if I would have interviewed people who think being Finnish American is insignificant or it resonates negative feelings. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the researcher being Finnish may have an influence on the informants. For example, I cannot know if someone emphasized their Finnishness and ethnic identity because I am Finnish. Because of this, it was important to

also use the method of participant observation to see how Finnish Americans represent their ethnic heritage in their daily lives and in public events.

I have common ancestors with some of the informants and it helped me getting in contact with them. In fact, having Finnish American cousins and having been in contact with them was one of the reasons why I became interested in this research topic. Some of these relatives of mine I had met at least once before either in Finland or in the USA before interviewing them. The majority of the informants — regardless of them being or not being related to me — were new acquaintances and I met them during the fieldwork periods in 2016 or 2018. Even though some of the informants are related to me, I did my best to conduct the interviews the same way with all my informants. The interview questions were the same for everybody. However, the informant may have been more open to share their thoughts if I had met them before — compared to the informants that I had just recently met before the interview.

Every research project has ethnical issues in different stages of the research; permission to conduct the research, gathering the data, participating in the community and publishing the results. Anthropologists must formally or informally seek informed consent to conduct their work (Fetterman 2010: 143). Before every interview I told the informants why I am doing this research and asked their permission to interview them. Using pseudonyms is a simple way to disguise the identity of individuals and protect them from potential harm (Fetterman 2010: 147). I am using pseudonyms to protect the identity of my informants. For the same reason I am not telling their exact age, but instead their age group, and the names of their hometowns are not mentioned, only the states they were born in or where they are living at the time of the interview. I have chosen the pseudonyms for the informants randomly from lists of the most common names given for children in the decades my informants were born.

The events that I conducted participant observation were public events open to anybody no matter what their ethnicity. In the case of most events that I attended, I reveal only the state where the event was held and not the city, town or village. I am making an exception with some of the annual events that are held in the Hancock area, in cases when I have attached a photo of the event to this thesis paper. When I was observing in the events, I did not observe any certain persons but people and activities in general; what people were wearing, what kind of foods were sold or eaten, and what kind of performances there were. From the events and conversations with people, I have made general conclusions of how Finnish Americans represent and maintain their ethnic identity and their thoughts about their Finnish heritage.

3.3 Processing and analysis of the data

When I was deciding the interview questions, I had assumptions of what kind of topics my informants might talk about. The interview themes were influenced by these assumptions. These presumptions were also made from the theoretical literature I have read for this research. My analysis is theory-guided, which means that the theory can act as aid but the analysis is not completely based on theory. The reasoning in theory-guided analysis is usually abductive, and data-based models and previous models or theory alternate in the thinking process (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 109-110). This means that the analysis begins with a data-based approach and theory is included to structure and guide the analysis.

For the analysis of the data I used qualitative content analysis. Content analysis aims at getting a description of the research phenomena in a condensed and general form, and organizing the data for conclusions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 117, 122). Qualitative content analysis is a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way, which is done by transferring consecutive parts of the material — the

transcripts — to the categories of the coding frame (Scheier 2012: 1; McKee 2003: 127). In qualitative research, content analysis highlights themes that clarify the research problem (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 175). In other words, it limits the analysis to those aspects that are relevant with the research questions (Scheier 2012: 7). The main categories are related to the research questions and subcategories can be drawn from the theory or the research data. The subcategories specify what is said about the aspects related to the research questions. (Scheier 2012: 59-60.) By reducing the data, the irrelevant material is eliminated from the analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018: 123).

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. I started the analysis by reading each transcript looking for recurring symbolic meanings and how their usage. Reading the transcripts, I noticed that there were themes that appeared in many interviews. I built a coding frame using these themes and in that way I divided the material into units of coding or themes. The coding frame was built using the research questions, according to previous theory on identity construction and ethnicity, as well as the themes that I had noticed when reading the transcripts. The themes were named with descriptive names — for example; sauna, *sisu*, food or cuisine, kinship, mix of ethnicities, ethnic stigma, language, national symbols, artefacts, organizations and clubs, events, and differences between ethnicities or cultures. I read the transcripts with the themes in mind and color coded them. Then I clustered concepts that depict the same phenomena and I transferred them to another file and titled themes. Lastly was the main analysis and interpretation and presenting the findings of my research.

4 Representing the Finnish American identity

4.1 Symbolic identity

Finnish Americans are connected by the symbolic idea of a nation or ethnicity — the imagined community of Finnish Americans (cf. Anderson 1991). This idea or narratives of an ethnic group are maintained by different cultural systems that represent an ethnicity and give it its meaning (Hall 2003: 94). The meanings are included in the narratives told about the people and the memories that connect past and images constructed of the ethnicity (Hall 1999: 47). Descendants of immigrants tell stories of their ancestors that lived in their native country and who immigrated to North America. In many stories there can be emphasis on the perseverance and courageousness, omitting the stories of poverty and misery. In Finnish American context the idea of *sisu* — the Finns' tenacity when dealing with extremely difficult circumstances — is many times emphasized and it seems to be a connective factor of Finnish Americans. For some, *sisu* is part of their Finnishness. (Alanen 2012: 4.) *Sisu* was mentioned in many of my interviews and I also heard it many times during my fieldwork. When I asked William if Finland or Finnish heritage is part of his identity, he answered;

Certainly, I have sisu. A little bit at least. It's very important to me... I would say maybe sisu represent Finland to me.
William, 60-65

William — as well as many other Finnish Americans that I have been interacting with — said that having *sisu* is essential in being Finnish and in their Finnish American identity. In the construction of their identity *sisu* is a symbolic representation of Finnish ethnicity and what is needed to be a Finn. Some people referred to *sisu* as the tenacity of their ancestors in Finland and their immigrant ancestors, and how Finns survive in tough situations

with *sisu*. For some people, having *sisu* is the vital element of Finnishness. Symbols of ethnic heritage were very visible in my fieldwork regions and I saw symbols used in many different places. In figure 3 there are three different symbols that represent the place of residence but also ethnic heritage. The symbols are the map of Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the Finnish flag and the word *sisu*. All three of these symbols are very common in the Copper Country. People want to bring out their attachment to the area but also to their Finnish heritage with these kinds of symbols. The use of symbols in — for example — clothing is one way of constructing and maintaining the concept of *sisu* as a representation of Finnishness. *Sisu* is seen as something mystical, an ideal only possessed by Finns. In reality, there is no such thing as *sisu* that unite all Finnish people. It is a symbol that has a collective meaning of representing Finnishness to Finns in Finland and Finnish Americans.



Figure 3. T-shirt with the Finnish flag, map of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and *sisu* in a store in Upper Peninsula Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

These kinds of symbols are also used in a very permanent and visible way in tattoos on people's skin. I have talked to a few people who have one or more tattoos with Finnish symbols or who would like to get one. Chris explained;

I'd like to get a tattoo of some Finnish symbols, such as a bear paw with the word sisu in the palm, and perhaps with the Finnish flag incorporated in somehow. Chris, 30-34

The word *sisu* is very common in Finnish themed tattoos. Also the Finnish flag or the lion of the Finnish coat of arms are popular motifs. Tattoos are one way of representing a person's Finnish American heritage. It is not related to nationalism — like it more commonly would be in Finland — but to the pride in the ethnic heritage and wanting to show that publicly.

In 1960s there was a revival of interest in ethnic heritage among descendants of immigrants (Leinonen 2014a: 292). Ethnicity became a central source of identity and people started to talk about ethnic revival or reawakening (Martikainen et al. 2006: 17). Among third and fourth generation immigrants there can be revival of an interest in ethnicity which emphasizes the view of identity and the feeling of being (Gans 1979: 1). In this case, the feeling of being Finnish American. However, Gans also argues that ethnic revival has not happened, instead ethnic symbols have become more visible with third generation immigrants. People have adopted a new ethnic behavior and connection which Gans (1979) calls symbolic ethnicity. The further immigrant generations go from their ethnic country, the more distant memories they have of their ancestors and heritage. Third and fourth generation Finnish Americans may not have direct interactions with Finland or they may not have much knowledge about it. For example, five of my informants had not been in Finland. Nevertheless, they were interested in the ethnic identity — the feeling of ethnicity — and how the identity can be experienced and expressed in a way most suitable for themselves.

Symbolic ethnicity is characterized by a nostalgic loyalty to the immigrant generation and to the native country (Gans 1979: 9). Gans argues that most of the third generation immigrants are looking for an easy and irregular expressions of identity that is not in contradiction with their lifestyle. Meaning that either symbolic or ceremonial cultural attributes that do not take too much time and do not disturb daily routines or enable the meeting of family and relatives from time to time (Gans 1979: 10). To the third generation and their descendants ethnicity has become a replaceable part of identity that is characterized by freedom of choice (Saari 2014: 7). Symbolic nature of ethnicity means that people are not immersed in the ethnic environment all the time, every day of the week, but ethnicity is expressed with more occasional behaviors that are characteristic to the ethnic culture (Palo Stoller 1997: 58). They can learn Finnish language, decorate their home with Finnish artefacts, read about Finnish culture, cook Finnish food, join a Finnish American club or organization, have Finnish holiday traditions, or build a sauna in their backyard or basement.

It is not essential how many Finnish flags there are on the yards of Finnish Americans or how often they bake *nisu* (or *pulla*, a Finnish coffee bread). What is important, is how the Finnish flag and *nisu* are understood to represent part of the Finnish American ethnic identity and act as a symbolic representation of Finnishness. Many third and fourth generation Americanized descendants of immigrants have a strong subjective ethnic identity (Sintonen 1999: 132). Sintonen talks about ethnic finders who are American but have developed a symbolic relationship with their ancestry. Things taken from cultural past — such as folk music and art — can act as symbols of ethnic identity. They have a chance to choose how they define their ethnic identity and what attributes best fit their needs and interests (Leinonen 2014a: 292; Suutari: 2004; Sintonen 1999). Finnishness can be an enriching or harmless addition to their everyday lives.

There are also “lost Finns” in the USA, who have not declared their Finnishness in censuses, and who have decided to exclude their Finnish heritage from their identity (Saari 2014: 7). Of course they still have the genetic roots in Finland but they do not want to identify themselves as Finnish Americans. People of Finnish ancestry might never admit their Finnishness for reasons like being ignorant, ashamed, feeling discriminated against, or simply not caring about their ethnic heritage (Westerberg 1997: 85). Therefore, I argue that having a Finnish American identity is not based on primordial connection to Finnish people, but the construction of identity also needs symbolic meanings and a willingness to be part of the Finnish American community.

4.1.1 Language

Sharing a culture is one aspect of defining ethnicity, and language probably being the most notable part of culture (Korkiasaari 2004: 4). Even though language is said to be important, language has practically lost its communicative function. Its value has become largely symbolic. (Čiubrinskas 2009: 81.) Language can be a meaningful symbol of ethnic identity even though not many people in the group speak the language (Liebkind 1994: 23). The meaningfulness of course differs, because for some the language is very important part of cultural identity but for others it is insignificant. Even though the language is not commonly spoken anymore, emotional attachment to the ethnic group can be strong (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1997). Ethnic revival can be seen more as based on will and feeling than competence in speaking a language (Honko 1995: 141). Korkiasaari (2004: 12) sees language as a primary importance in getting deeper insight into the Finnish culture and building live contacts with Finnish relatives. As Richard said, *I decided to learn some Finnish and Swedish language so that I could communicate with the elders*. Richard told that he cannot speak Finnish fluently but he can speak some words so that he can be understood and he can understand basic

Finnish expressions. For him it was important to speak directly to the Finnish relatives who do not speak any English. For Chris, the language had also a symbolic connection to his ancestry;

I want to learn because it sounds beautiful and it would be nice to be able to speak the language of my ancestry, even if I don't have much use for it in daily conversation. Chris, 30-34

John was the only one of my informants who could speak fluent Finnish. He is not married to a Finnish American so he did not speak Finnish in their home or on a daily basis. However, he was involved in Finnish American organizations and when I visited them we spoke Finnish. He said that he speaks some Finnish words with his children sometimes. *“Especially with one of my sons we goof around and use short Finnish salutations when we see each other”*, he says.

According to Šabec (2016), some people claim language to be an intrinsic part of their ethnic identity, but others say that language does not play an important or even central role in the construction of ethnic identity. Some define their ethnic identity according to the skill of speaking the language;

I'm American. My dad was full-blooded Finn, but my mom was not. I don't speak Finn. That's why... Mary, 60-64

Ethnicity can be a stigma and immigrants may have pressure to assimilate to the mainstream culture (e.g. Eidheim 1971; Korkiasaari 2004: 12; Šabec 2016: 77). The first generation of Finnish Americans in Michigan did not want to learn English and many of them did not even need to learn other languages. Second and third generation Finnish Americans assimilated easier because they attended English schools where they met people from other ethnic groups. (Virtanen 2014: 265.) Consequently, many second generation Finnish Americans were forced to speak English in schools and sometimes even in their homes.

In my grandma's school they were punished if they spoke Finnish. So they always had to speak English. But then at home Finnish was spoken as first language. Jessica, 20-24

In schools everybody had to be American and many times ethnic cultures were not allowed to be seen or heard. Language skills have an important role in integration to the mainstream society, but also in maintaining ethnic culture (Lammervo 2009: 70). In Jessica's grandmother's home Finnish was spoken so they were able to keep the language and have a chance to speak it. This was not the case in every Finnish American household;

For my generation it was encouraged to learn Finnish, but for my mom she wanted to learn it growing up. But my grandmother, her mother said; "no we don't speak Finnish anymore, we are in America. We speak English, not Finnish." So she didn't get an opportunity to learn it. It was kinda shut out. I think that's sad because I think the language is so much about where you come from. Sarah, 30-34

For the first and second generation Finnish Americans, the pressure to assimilate to the mainstream American culture was stronger. At the time, the enculturation was pro-American, emphasizing: "You are American now, we are all American now" (Čiubrinskas 2009: 83). In late 1900s and in 2000s the way of seeing ethnic heritage is more integrating different parts of ethnic culture to people's lives. Therefore, for Sarah's generation it has been encouraged to learn Finnish language, but she was saddened of the assimilation pressure of preceding generations because for her Finnish language was a big part of her ethnic identity.

Although many of my informants had taken Finnish classes, it was in their childhood and they had forgotten most of it. Many had been exposed to Finnish in their childhood homes or in their grandparents' homes but after the first generation passed away they had nobody to talk to because their parents had not learned the language. In Lammervo's (2009) research on Finnish Australians, she found out that having Finnish speaking family

members in the household is important in language maintenance. The need for using Finnish regularly in family communication creates a natural language use domain (Lammervo 2009: 43). The same result was among Hungarians in Sweden, researched by Straszer (2011: 176).

Sarah, Linda and Sharon spoke about being more exposed to the language when they were children and they had someone to speak Finnish with. But when they did not have anybody to speak with and they started to forget the language.

I feel like I knew a lot more growing up because I took Finnish language classes when I was in first and second grade. I could talk with my mom's mom because she knew Finnish and I would practice with her. Once she passed away, I didn't have anyone to practice that with. I wish I would have been able to keep up with it but I just didn't have anybody to speak with because my mom didn't know it and then my great-grandmother has passed away. Sarah, 30-34

Now, if I overheard Finns talking, I probably couldn't get much of it. When I was a kid, because I had to learn enough of it to talk to my grandmother and grandfather. I have what we call Finnenglish (Finglish). I was pretty good at that. Linda, 65-69

Jessica took Finnish language classes while she was studying in Finland, but she was wondering how she could keep up with the language when she goes back to the USA. She said, “*I don't know how easy it'll be going back to USA because I'm not constantly surrounded by it.*”

There are Finnish language classes held in many Finnish American communities. For example, there is a Finnish language camp for children every summer in Minnesota (e.g. Concordia Language Villages 2019). Thomas told that his children have been to the language camp numerous times. Some universities teach classes in Finnish language and culture, usually part of Nordic or

Scandinavian Studies programs (e.g. Finlandia University 2019b; University of California Berkeley 2019; University of Washington). I was able to observe a Finnish language and culture class in an elementary school in Michigan. I am not sure if the teacher was Finnish American or not, but the classroom was decorated with a Finnish flag and there were for example numbers in Finnish on the wall. During the class the students were learning how to play the *kantele*. Of course not all of the children in the class were of Finnish descent but these kind of classes tell that the Finnish heritage is visible in the area and part of the lives of people living there.

Most of my informants said that they know or have heard at least some Finnish words. Mary and William told that they do not speak Finnish except a few odd words. Many people know only some expressions or phrases in Finnish. As William said; “*I can count, yks, kaks, kolme, neljä, viis. And I can’t even separate them to one or two but it was a phrase that I learned when I was young*”. Many had heard Finnish words used by their grandparents especially when they were playing with them. Sarah explained how her parents and grandparents used to tell that it is nap time in Finnish;

One that I grew up learning was nukkumaa [go to sleep]. We would say it’s time for nukkumaa which sounds much more fun than saying it’s time for a nap. Sarah, 30-34

Jessica recalled spending time with her grandfather as a child and how he would sing children’s songs in Finnish to her. She mentioned that one of the songs was Itchy bitsy spider (*hämä-hämähäkki*) but she could not remember the name in Finnish anymore. She also told about how his grandfather played with his grandchildren in Finnish;

My grandfather would take the kids on his lap and bounce them and sing a song and in the end he would go hippa! [catch!] and then he would open his legs and drop you on the

floor but then he's catch you. But that was always in Finnish.
Jessica, 20-24

Sometimes the Finnish words were used so often that those were the words children learned instead of the equivalent word in English.

One of the first words, the first time I learned what a fish was. My grandfather had gone fishing and brought home some fish and they were in a bucket in the kitchen. And he kept saying kala, kala. It took me the longest time when I'd see a fish the first word that wants to come out of my mouth is kala. It's the only word that's like that.
Linda, 65-69

For the adults — usually first and second generation Finnish Americans — Finnish was sometimes used as a secret language when they wanted to talk without the children understanding. Jessica said, “*If my grandparents didn't want us to know something, they would talk in Finnish*”. Sharon and Michael also discussed this;

Our parents always used Finnish as sort of a secret language (Sharon: yeah that's true) to discuss those that we weren't supposed to hear.
Michael, 70-74

Although Finnish was used as a secret language of the adults, sometimes they were not able to keep the secrets if the children had learned enough Finnish to understand. “*It was funny because when I was five or six and my mother was talking with her friend and she decided that she didn't want us to know what she was saying. So she changed to Finnish. And I sat there and said, I know what you're talking about*”, Linda said with laughter.

4.1.2 Food culture

Food products can also be a common ethnic symbol (Gans 1979: 10) and food plays an important role in the heritage and lives of Finns abroad (Lammervo 2009: 122). Names of foodstuff and dishes are commonly used in conversations in the ethnic language (Šabec 2016: 77). The ethnic names can be used to emphasize the Finnish heritage of the food item and to emphasize the difference of the food compared to something similar in the American cuisine. Although, Finnish American food culture — like other ethnic cultures in the USA too — has been influenced by American mainstream culture and other ethnic cultures (Lockwood 2015: 196).

In Finnish America common foods are squeaky cheese (*leipäjuusto*), Finnish oven pancake (*pannukakku*), rye bread, prune tarts (*luumutorttu* or *joulutorttu*), *viili* (curdled milk similar to yogurt), pickled fish (most often herring) and coffee bread (*pulla* or *nisu*). During my fieldwork these food items were very commonly seen on different Finnish American events and potluck dinners. Pastries — like *nisu* and *pannukakku* — are sold in many coffee shops and bakeries in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and for example in Finnish cafes or restaurants in other states too, for example in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Seattle, Washington.

Lammervo (2009: 118) says that *pulla* is one of the central elements of Finnish culture and the smell and taste of freshly baked *pulla* brings back memories of home, and she says, because of that, *pulla* continues to be an element of celebrations as well as everyday life (figure 4). Many of the recipes were family recipes inherited from grandmothers or great-grandmothers who emigrated from Finland. The recipes were similar to what I have seen in present day Finland, at least for the most part. One of the differences was that the prune tarts were eaten year round, in comparison to them being a Christmas specialty in Finland. There are also Finnish American cookbooks published, one of the best known Finnish American cookbook authors is probably Beatrice

Ojakangas who has published many books of Finnish and Scandinavian recipes that are adapted for the American cooks (e.g. Ojakangas 1989).



Figure 4. Finnish *pulla* (or *nisu*) sold in a cafe in Minnesota (photo: Anni Arvio).

When I asked John what represents Finland to him, he answered “*a good sauna. And pulla*”. The dishes may be considered everyday dishes in Finland, but among Finnish Americans they may have special, symbolic meanings in expressing the Finnish American ethnic identity (Lockwood 2015: 196). Especially in the Finnish areas of Michigan and Minnesota there are shops that sell Finnish food products — mainly chocolate, coffee, salty liquorice (*salmiakki*) or rye bread. In the Copper Country I saw Finnish foods on the menus in many cafes or restaurants, most often *pannukakku* and *nisu*. A local sausage manufacturing company makes *saunamakkara* (sauna sausage) and in local supermarkets there are Finnish products, such as *leipäjuusto* and rye crispbread or Finn crisp (*hapankorppu*). A local coffee roastery has named one of their coffee *So Suomi* as “a tribute to the *sisu* lifestyle” (figure 5).



Figure 5. So Suomi coffee from Keeweenaw Coffee Works in Calumet, Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

I must note, that the Finnish American foodstuff is not only bought and eaten by Finnish Americans. At least in Upper Peninsula Michigan, many Americans who have no connection to Finnish heritage also bake and buy these foods. The area can have an influence on that, because most of my informants from other regions did not cook Finnish foods or some could not even name any Finnish foods.

We call certain food in Finnish. Like there's kropsua which is a Finnish pancake but you make it with egg and you put jam or jelly on it and sugar... And then hot dogs, makkara. That's when we're up north in my grandparents' house; "oh let's have kropsua for breakfast and makkara for dinner".

Jessica, 20-24

Grandma used to make kakkuleipä and mojakka, those are just things that I remember.

Michael, 70-74

The region in Finland where the immigrant ancestors were from also affects the words Finnish Americans use to describe Finnish foods. Because the Finnish immigrants were mostly from western and northern regions of Finland, the foods of those areas were more influential on shaping the Finnish American food culture (Lockwood 2015: 195). For me — a native of Lapland — the words *kropsu* and *mojakka* were new and I did not know them before the fieldwork and interviews. *Kropsu* is quite a lot the same as *pannukakku*, but it is a regional word from Ostrobothnia. Also *mojakka* — a fish or beef soup — is another regional word that I did not know. When I was in Hancock many people were amazed that I did not know, what *mojakka* is because I must know it because I am from Finland. I found out that *mojakka* is a regional food from the Kalajoki area on the Gulf of Bothnia (Mojakka 2008). Paula and Jaska Poikonen (2014) had the same kind of experience in Minnesota when their Finnish American friends asked them about *mojakka*. The names Finnish Americans use for certain foods can also be an older word that is not commonly used in Finland anymore. *Kakkuleipä* (cake bread) — a sort of coffee bread, such as *nisu* or *pulla* — and *mojakka* mentioned by Michael, are examples of these kind of words.

4.2 Kinship

According to the primordial perspective of ethnicity, ethnicity is connected to having shared ancestry or a myth of origin (Korkiasaari 2004: 4). I have argued in previous chapters that ethnicity is not only primordial but also symbolic. However, I have to take into account that my informants do have ancestors in Finland and many of them considered their Finnishness being related also to their family and kinship with Finnish people. Furthermore, ethnicity as kinship can also be based on a symbolic or mythological ancestor, especially if people do not know a lot about their family's genealogy. According to Baumann (2004: 12) ethnicity is a myth of common ancestry that includes the idea of

common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnic group a sense of fictive kinship. Three of my informants — Sarah, William and John — said that it is important for everybody to know about their family's background and heritage. They connected that to their own view of their Finnish heritage but also to a bigger, more philosophical view of life and how knowing history affects the future and people's lives.

I feel like if you know more of your history then you know how to move forward in life. I feel like if you know where you came from and have those roots and embrace that. I feel like there's people that I've met that don't know anything about their heritage or maybe they were adopted but they have no interest. And that kinda makes me sad because then I think that how... I feel like it's nice to have the roots or the ground, the grounded background.

Sarah, 30-34

I am so delighted to have a connection to Finland and to know my roots, it's just a neat part of feeling about the world, that you are a part of something bigger. I think that's important for all of us to feel.

William, 60-64

People want to have a feeling of being part of a continuum of their family's heritage, history and folklore (Gans 1979: 8). People who recognize themselves as Finnish Americans want to feel that they are part of a group that has *sisu* and can cope in any situation — no matter how hard the circumstances are — or that they are part of the continuum of people in their lineage of Finnish ancestors.

In order for people to form a group they must have something in common. In Palo Stoller's (1997: 58) research her informants said that they feel a special bond with people of the same ethnic background, even if they have not met before — they have an imagined connection to the group. Finnish Americans feel like there is a sense of kinship because they all have ancestry in Finland. Especially William and Richard point out that their connection to Finland and their Finnish American identity is

through the family connection and relatives in Finland. Richard has been to three family reunions in Finland. When I asked why he wants to travel to the reunion, he said, “*to maintain the contacts. So that they remember who we are*”. Richard’s comment not only tell about his own motivation to attend reunions and the importance family relations are to him, but also it tells how Finnish Americans want their Finnish relatives to keep in contact with them. Also when I asked him why he wants to visit Finland he answered, “*We want to visit the people. That’s the priority*”. For him it was the people that are the most important reason to visit Finland — to see and meet Finnish relatives and keeping the connection alive. William had not been to Finland but he said;

I’d very much like to go see the old family farm and see the space that gave my family its name so many hundreds of years ago... My family. I learned Finnish from my family. Actually I don’t know what images or what things I would use for Finnish culture because I’m not that well educated about Finnish culture it’s been a tie to family. William, 60-64

For William, the Finnish heritage meant the connection to his family. Many of the informants who had been to Finland, had visited places that are meaningful for their family. Jessica had visited the church where her grandparents were married. Many Finnish Americans do not know where their family had come from. In my work at the Finnish American historical archive I helped genealogists to find out where in Finland they had come from. I argue, that the region, town or village is important to at least some Finnish Americans and part of their ethnic identity is to know the geographic location of their ancestors. For some it can be important to know where the farm, which gave them their family name, is located. People may want to have knowledge of the physical place or building where their ancestors lived. Visiting the family farm or a church gives a very concrete way of knowing where the ancestors came from and how they lived. Even though the Finnish identity can be symbolic, but knowing the exact

village or farm gives a proof of a tangible evidence of the ancestors living in Finland.

How much the family embraces the ethnic heritage and identity can have an influence on the exposure to the ethnic culture in a person's life. The connection of Finnishness fades — expectedly — generation by generation (Korkiasaari 2004: 12). This process of fading can be slowed down if experiences in a person's childhood and living environment are positive toward Finnish ethnicity. For example, parents' and grandparents' role in teaching and telling about Finnish ancestry and traditions is very important. As Michael said, *"I think we always had a real sense of identity, especially my mother was very interested in Finnish culture and she was involved in the community"*.

It also has an influence if the child is first born or last born of the siblings. I heard many stories told by my informants and other people that Finnish language had been taught to the oldest children but over the time they became more assimilated to American culture and the youngest children in the family were not taught Finnish language or the Finnish culture became less visible in the home.

My mother was the 5th of the group of 8. So as you go down the line there's less and less Finnish being spoken and much more Americanized.
Sharon, 70-74

Jessica also told that her uncle and aunt were taught to speak Finnish but her father — who is younger — was not.

The significance of family connections to Finland or in the USA influence how much contact a person has to their ethnic heritage and group. *"We always had these big family gatherings"*, said Michael who was happy to have the connection to his extended family. Sharon guessed that the meaning of family depends also how much contact people have with their family and relatives.

We probably do more with regard to my Finnish and Swedish heritage than my husband has done with his [Greek] heritage. But it just depends on how much you see your relatives too because at least my husband hasn't reached out to his own relatives.
Sharon, 70-74

I've been especially fortunate to have an active Finnish family clan that I can relate to and learn about and learn from.
William, 60-64

Some Finnish American families have family members who have collected stories about the family and written family history books about their families and ancestry. There are families in Finland who have created their own coat of arms, crests, emblems or pennants with logos or symbols related to the history of the family or other symbols that represent the family to its members (figure 6).

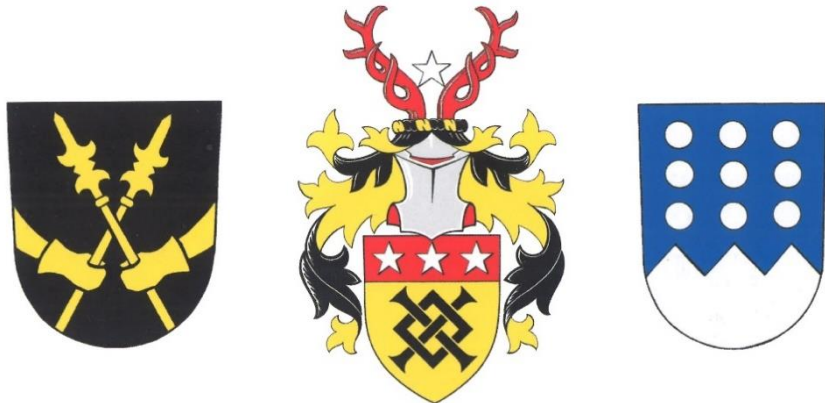


Figure 6. Examples of Finnish coat of arms. Vartiainen family society (left), Teittinen family (center) and Hagelberg-Raekallio family society (right) (The heraldic society of Finland 2006: 40).

In late 1900s coat of arms have become part of the identity of many families and family societies in Finland (Matikkala 2011:

222). Heraldic emblems can be symbols of pride and history, they visually mark a community and distinguish it from other communities — thus, becoming a component of ethnic self-awareness or identity (Chistiakov 2013: 52-53). If the family has their own symbols, Finnish Americans may have them also visible in their home. In a sense, it is a way of showing their connection to the family, ancestors and relatives in Finland but also acts as a symbolic representation of the connection to the family and ethnicity.

We have that family coat of arms that has been developed for our family, we have one of those. Richard, 70-74

I have a stand with the family logo on a display case. William, 60-64

In the contemporary world, modern technology enables active and fast connection with friends and relatives. People can contact each other via social media and share ideas, memories and thoughts to other Finnish Americans but also relatives in Finland. Technology and digitalized records enable easier genealogical research which has helped in finding ethnic root and reviving some of the traditions (Korkiasaari 2012: 45). Genealogy is fairly popular in the USA. John was the only one of my informants who said that they have done genealogy. He explained, “*I have tried to keep a list of genealogy. I’ve worked quite hard on it few years back but last few years I haven’t brought it up to date which I need to do.*”

Recently, commercial DNA-testing kits have become more popular when people want to test where their ancestors came from according to their DNA. In Finnish American groups in social media there have been quite a lot of conversation about the tests and their results. Some have been very happy to find out what percentage of their DNA is Finnish, but there have also been disappointments when the result is smaller percentage than what they expected. There are also people in the USA who have become interested in Finnish culture after their test result have shown a percentage of Finnish, even though they did not know

they have ancestors in Finland. People may reconstruct their ethnic identity after finding out the DNA-test results. Of course the test results may not be completely accurate and there are flaws in the algorithms the companies use to determine the geographical regions. Louhelainen (2019) reminds that the DNA-tests as such are accurate, but — at this moment — the results are estimates and that the interpretation of them is another problem. Also, I argue that being Finnish American is not only dependent on what percentage of Finnish DNA a person has. Finnish American ethnic identity is more than a test result and it does not represent the symbolic aspect of ethnicity.

4.3 Material culture

4.3.1 Sauna

Driving around the countryside of Michigan's Upper Peninsula I saw many farm houses with small sheds on their yards. But these were not ordinary sheds, these had chimneys on the roof. In fact, these were not sheds at all, these were saunas. The same was in rural Massachusetts where Linda took me for a drive to show me their summer camp and the what-used-to-be some of the Finntowns.

Does that look like a garage? It's a sauna... [Pointing at their neighbor's garage] That building used to be the sauna but they made it into a shed. It's the only one that doesn't have the sauna now. Everybody has a sauna. A lot of these places that have garages, when the people bought them, they converted the garages into saunas. So the standard joke is if you go out on these Finntown roads, don't trust if you're buying a house with a garage, you're probably not. You're probably buying a house with sauna. Linda, 65-69

The sauna has long been a key to the identification of Finnish farmsteads (Cross: 293), and Alanen (2012: 4) claims, that sauna is the most visible Finnish cultural marker in Minnesota. The sauna is in most people's minds one of the most distinct identifiers of Finnishness (Kauppinen 1997; Alanen 2012: 42). Before 1920s in Minnesota a characteristic of a Finnish farm was a smoke sauna (*savusauna*, figure 7). In 1920s saunas with a metal stove (*kiuas*) that had a compartment for the stones, stovepipe and chimney to direct the smoke outside started to replace the smoke saunas (Alanen 2012: 44).



Figure 7. *Savusauna* (smoke sauna) built in 1868 in Minnesota (photo: Anni Arvio).

Finnish Americans continues to build and use saunas, incorporating them into their daily lives (Sando 2014: 3). In towns and cities where outside saunas could not be built, many Finnish Americans have built saunas in their basements. Some

people have imported the stoves from Finland but local suppliers are also used or people even learn how to make the stove themselves (e.g. Lockwood 2012: 50). Building materials are adapted to what is available in the USA. For example, many have used cedar wood to build the walls and the benches inside the sauna (Lockwood 2012:51), instead of pine which is traditionally used in Finland. Many people have wood-heated saunas instead of electric, because they think the wood-heated saunas are more traditional and authentic than the modern electric saunas.

That's dry wood there in the shed so my son can have dry firewood in the winter when he wants to go to the sauna. We have two saunas and they're all wood saunas. We don't have electric saunas.
Linda, 65-69

For some people sauna represents Finnishness in itself, meaning that they are the same as Finnish culture, and for others they do not (Anttila 1993: 108). As Chris said; *"I know that the sauna is a big part of Finnish culture and that saunas were created by the Finns"*. Sauna is thought to be Finnish, but in fact different kinds of warm or hot steam rooms have also been part of other cultures around the world — for example in Russia, Vikings in Scandinavia and Native Americans in North America (Liikkanen 2016).

Many Finnish and Finnish American people understand sauna as a Finnish creation because it is constructed to being part of Finnish culture. William told me that he was aware of the sauna as a Finnish tradition but he did not have a sauna and did not particularly seek out for the opportunities to go to sauna — for him it was not an important part of his ethnic identity. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula — where saunas are rather common in Finnish American houses or summer camps — Jessica and Sarah grew up taking saunas with their family members:

I grew up with a sauna in my whole life. So every time I go to visit my grandfather, aunt or uncle, which is like twice a year, then we always use the sauna... It's just because lots of

people have them up there. They're all Finnish people so that's what I always thought when I thought what Finnish people was.
Jessica, 20-24

I grew up taking saunas. I don't know how other people live but I feel like that's just something that was part of that Finnish culture. It's just kinda embedded, they built the sauna first and then they would built their house. For here anyways that's how it seems like I've heard from other families that's what worked for them.
Sarah, 30-34

Most of my informants mentioned sauna as a representation of Finland and Finnish culture to them. Therefore, it is an emotional subject to some of them because they felt like it something important to them. When I went to Michigan in April 2018, I soon learned that the pronunciation of Finnish words is very important to some Finnish Americans, and the word sauna was probably the most common word for people to discuss. Many Finnish Americans that I met there were very adamant of the way sauna should be pronounced and it seemed like almost everybody in the Finnish American community had an opinion about this matter. Although people do have strong opinions, most of the time it is light-hearted. Sarah — a native of Upper Peninsula — talked about how she felt about the “wrong” pronunciation of the word sauna. She associated the pronunciation with being proud of the heritage which includes knowing how to say Finnish words like the Finns in Finland say them. For her, these are silly things Finnish Americans do because they are proud of their Finnish heritage.

I can't stand when people say sauna [pronounced saw-na]. 'Cause when I hear people say sauna [saw-na] and I'm just “aww no that's not”, you don't understand... That topic right there comes up so much between people in the area, it's pretty funny... It's like a very proud thing, it's like another little thing that you're proud of it so say it right. It's so simple and

*silly... I feel like people are very proud of that heritage here,
or the culture.* Sarah, 30-34

In a way, Loan words can act as a means of separating insiders from outsiders (Rankinen 2014). Even though in this case the separation between Finns and other ethnicities is made with tongue in cheek.

4.3.2 Artefacts

A lot of the memory-work of immigrants occurs not in public, but in the private sphere — for example through the display of valued photographs and objects of the homeland in people's homes (Buciek & Juul 2008). There is an interest among the third and fourth generation Finnish Americans in the nostalgia and finding their roots (Suojanen & Suojanen 2000: 44). This nostalgia and heritage are visible in the homes of Finnish Americans in small items, knick-knacks, flags, Finnish designed set of dishes and glassware, pictures and paintings, or family heirlooms. Some have national costumes that they wear on holiday events or dance performances, some has the Finnish flag outside of their house.

National symbols are important part of ethnic identity. These symbols can be, for example, flags and pennants, national costumes, musical instruments — like *kantele* and *jouhikko*, folksongs, art or artefacts (figure 8). Of course the sauna is not the only feature in Finnish American culture that is a means of expressing ethnic identity through material objects. In many homes of Finnish Americans that I have visited, there have been artefacts from Finland or artefacts that symbolizes Finnish heritage.



Figure 8. *Kantele*, a traditional Finnish instrument, from the collection of the Finnish American Heritage Center in Hancock, Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

During the fieldwork, I was invited for dinner in a Finnish American home. Entering the house I saw a *tervetuloa* (welcome) sign next to the front door. In the dining room they had Finnish design glass items, such as Iittala on the shelves (figure 9). The dinner was served from Arabia plates and we drank from Iittala wine glasses. On the table there was a Marimekko tablecloth. This was visibly a home of a person who is really proud of their Finnish heritage, but I also saw many same kind of artefacts in other homes of Finnish Americans. As John said “*We have quite a few Finnish touches*”. Examples of items representing Finnish heritage are most often clothes, kitchen items, books, items with family symbols and wooden handicrafts.



Figure 9. Iittala dishes in a store in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Sarah was interested in the Finnish tradition of name days and she had a Finnish calendar. Name days are a tradition in Finland and other European countries that originates from the old Calendar of Saints. The tradition is also celebrated by some of the Finns in Australia. (Lammervo 2009: 109.) Mugs with Finnish symbols are quite common in Finnish American homes, and at least Sarah, Sharon and John mentioned having them.

I do have mugs and little things. I have a calendar with the name days. And then magnets or something. I do have mugs with sisu written on it. It's not from Finland but it's like Finnish heritage. I do have a mug that I gave my grandfather as a gift with sisu on it. Because he was always so proud of it and when he passed away I ended up getting that mug back... So it's proud, we're proud of it. My sister bought a little onesie for her baby. I think it probably said sisu on it. It had the Finnish flag on it.
Sarah, 30-34

John and his wife had mugs with grandmother (*isoäiti*) and grandfather (*isoisä*) texts on them and Sharon had a mug with the Finnish flag. With little items like this Finnish Americans bring their Finnish heritage part of their daily lives and make their identity visible in a very mundane way. Even though the artefacts may not be from Finland, they are a way of representing the pride in the Finnish heritage (figures 10 & 11).



Figure 10. Mugs sold in a gift shop in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).



Figure 11. Finnish and Swedish souvenirs sold in a gift shop in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Some Finnish Americans express their ethnic heritage with different kinds of signs in their homes and bumper stickers or license plates on their cars (figure 12). In a sense, these are ways of representing the Finnish heritage publicly to others and showing the pride in their ethnic heritage, but also they can act as

a symbolic reminder to a person of their ethnic heritage. These signs have typically words or pictures on them and they are usually humorous and witty. I saw many different signs in people's homes or shops that say for example; "parking for Finns only", "made in America with Finnish parts", "*tyytyväisyys on elämän onni*" (happiness is a joy of life) and many welcome signs as well as *sisu*-related texts. Bumper stickers on cars had Finnish flags and texts such as *sisu*, "Finn power" or "I'd rather be in Finland". These novelty items were sold in many Finnish American seasonal events, markets (*tori*) or souvenir shops. Linda showed me the signs that she has in the sauna at their camp;

Over the years in the Finnish tori I've gotten signs. "Got sisu?", "Finnish have more steam", "Finn power". We've got one over at the house, it's the Finnish rules of sauna and it's in the Finnenglish [Finglish].
Linda, 65-69

And there were welcome signs in Finnish everywhere in the UP [Upper Peninsula Michigan], like everyone had them.
Jessica, 20-24



Figure 12. License plates with the Finnish flag and *sisu* sold in a store in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

National costumes (*kansallispuku*, figure 13) are used by some of Finnish Americans in certain holidays, such as Midsummer, or in cultural events, for example dance performances. Richard told me, “*We have kansallispuku, the costumes that we wear when we perform*”. Thomas said that he has as many as three national costumes. Sometimes people want to wear specifically the costume of the area where their ancestors were from, but sometimes it does not matter what the area is. What is more important is the Finnish heritage in general and where the costume design is from is secondary.



Figure 13. The national costume of Tuuteri. The costume is part of the collection of the Finnish American Historical Archive in Hancock, Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Of course, not all Finnish Americans have artefacts from Finland or items that represent Finnish heritage to them. Mary was the only one of my informants who said that she does not have items with Finnish symbols in her home. “*Not in our home, but when dad’s family got together I saw them*”, she said when I asked if she had Finnish artefacts. Many may only have the Finnish flag — which is usually put out only on special occasions — but no other visible, material evidence of Finnish heritage in their homes.

5 Understanding and defining Finnish American ethnic identity

5.1 Finnish, American or Finnish American?

Although all of my informants are citizens of the USA, most of them identified themselves according to their ethnic background. It is understood that having citizenship does not make a person completely Australian (Lammervo 2009: 142), or in my research American. In Lammervo's (2009: 139) research on Finnish Australians, one of the informants claimed that she is Finnish even though she has Australian citizenship. Lammervo says that this follows the pattern of distinguishing between the feeling of ethnicity and the official status of citizenship. In my research, even though my informants' official status is American — or citizen of the USA — they may claim that their nationality is something else than American — for example Finnish, Irish or Swedish — even though the term that I am using is their ethnicity instead of nationality.

During the interview, Jessica discussed how she distinguishes her nationality and ethnicity. She was guessing that the difference of talking about ethnicity and nationality is due to Finland being quite homogeneous compared to the USA where all people are immigrants or descendants of immigrants — with the exception of Native Americans. A sense of belonging is fundamentally relational, depending on context and situation (Ang et. al. 2006: 35). For Jessica, ethnicity depended on where you are and who is asking;

If people were to ask me where I'm from, I'm American. But then if they ask me my nationality, then I would go "oh I'm half Finnish and half other things"... I'm considered American when Finnish people ask me. But that's not how I would perceive myself... In America, because people are from

so many places when people ask you what is your nationality they are asking where your ancestors are from. Jessica, 20-24

Due to the USA being multiethnic, people are thinking of ancestry when they think what their nationality is. She also pointed out that even though Finnish people perceive her as American, it is not how she would identify herself; she identifies herself according to her ethnicities. In comparison, Thomas explained how he considers his ethnic identity;

Finnish-American. I'm not a Finnish national, and to be "just American" isn't enough. It doesn't say who I am.

Thomas, 60-64

Because Thomas does not have Finnish citizenship he does not consider himself Finnish national, but on the other hand he feels that identifying only as an American is not a sufficient expression. Hyphenated ethnicity — adding the person's ethnic origin to American — is a way of telling more specifically of a person's ethnic identity if they want to express it, provide a linkage to their ethnicity, or being — for example Finnish American — is an important part of their self-image (e.g. Chu et. al. 2017; Asghari-Fard & Hossain 2017).

When I asked my informants what they identify themselves as — Finnish or American — their answers were mostly something in between those two. Research has generally shown that the use of an ethnic or national label dominates in the first generation, and the use of a combination or bicultural label becomes more common in the second generation (Phinney 2003: 63). Nash (1988) describes this as secondary ethnicity, when people call themselves first American, but they also identify themselves with some other ethnicity — in this case Finnish. Even though some of my informants claimed their ethnic identity being completely American, they said that the Finnish roots have a place in their identity.

I'm definitely American. My identity is total American. But Finland is a place that I have a lot of feeling for, the people that I met there.
Richard, 70-74

Ethnicity is not inherited but constructed (Palo Stoller 1997: 57). Construction of ethnic identity does not have an on-off button of one ethnic group, but the selection is made from multiple ethnic identities (Waters 1990: 19). Most of my informants said that even though they are American they are also descendants of Finnish immigrants, and thus also have a sense of Finnish ethnic identity. Many Americans define their ethnic identity as something else than American; for example German, Chinese, Irish or Finnish. Many third and fourth generation Americans refer to themselves as Chinese or Irish even though they were born in the USA and are citizens of the USA (Eriksen 2010: 13). According to Schildkraut (2011) most of Americans say they are primarily Americans, but when they have an opportunity to select more than one nationality they declare themselves as American and one or more ethnic identities. Although American identity is a strong part of their national identity, their immigrant ancestors' ethnicity may play a big role in the construction of their own ethnic identity. As Eriksen (2010: 170) states, the American melting pot gave all immigrants' descendants the same basic values and language, but the melting pot did not occur in symbolic, material or political level because people still draw resources from their ethnic identification.

Because the USA is such a mix of ethnicities, it is common to have ancestors from multiple ethnicities. For second and third generation Finnish Americans spouses are more likely to be from some other ethnic group than Finnish, so third and fourth generation Finnish Americans can be Swedish American, German American or Scottish American too. Connection to their Finnish heritage can become obscure if the Finnish heritage is not considered meaningful in people's lives (Kero 1997: 375). Michael explained his identity as being half Finnish and half from two Eastern European countries. He says, "*I feel like I'm in both.*

I feel affinity to both cultures”. Sarah, Jessica and William told that they are more aware of their Finnish heritage and ancestry than other ethnicities in their family trees. Therefore they felt more connected to their Finnish heritage. William said that his mother’s side is less specific where they came from so it would be difficult to search for the history of that side of the family. Jessica explained how she feels strongly connected to her Finnish heritage because all of her grandparents’ on her father’s side are from Finland;

Because my dad is a 100 percent Finnish, I’m 50 percent because my mom is not. So I knew that 50 percent for sure I was Finnish. From my mom’s side, she’s a whole bunch of things so not as easy for me to connect with that culture because there’s so many. But I knew that oh, I’m 50 percent Finnish and such a cool thing that I’m so much of one culture. I feel like strongly connected to Finland in that sense. Many people are a lot of things. And it’s rare to find 100 percent or even 50.
Jessica, 20-24

I guess I consider myself American. But I feel like with that I also include my background like Finnish, Irish, Scottish, whatever else that I kinda know is there. I feel like the Finnish is more strong because of we have more of the Finnish traditions or maybe somewhat of cultural side of things. Yeah, maybe American Finnish but then with some other side things too.
Sarah, 30-34

John stated that he is an American but of Finnish heritage and background. He also claimed to be proud of both of them. Finnish heritage can be part of a person’s ethnic identity even though the contact with the heritage is limited;

I consider myself American of Finnish descent, as I am proud of Finland and being from there, but Finnish culture wasn’t really a part of my childhood.
Chris, 30-34

According to Jalkanen (1969: 212) the third generation typically had lost the language of their ancestors and was not in touch with the ethnic culture. Most of the third generation no longer think of themselves as the children of immigrants. At the most, they consider themselves Americans of Finnish descent. Sharon was the only informant who did not want to identify herself as either Finnish or American. She says that *“I feel, you feel affinity to whatever you have heard your heritage is”*. She sees ethnic identity as more of learned and dependent on the environment in which a person grows up in or is in contact with. Weckström (2019) points out the fluid nature of ethnic identity; ethnic identity is a changing part of a person which can be affected by time and place and different phases in a person’s life.

Although the children of immigrants may have wanted to forget their immigrant past, immigrants’ grandchildren or great-grandchildren want to acknowledge their roots and heritage. As Thomas said; *“It’s [knowing about the family history] very important to me. It’s our history — our immigrant story”*. The third generation is already far enough from their parents’ and grandparents’ difficulties in adapting to the new culture so that they can be proud of their ethnic heritage (Sintonen 1999: 122). However, not all first or second generation immigrants want to forget their heritage:

I’m positive. I’m proud of it. It’s not like you can choose where you come from, but I think it’s good to embrace it. I think that’s also because that rubbed off from my mom always being proud of being Finnish and then my grandparents.
Sarah, 30-34

We live thinking about our Finnish heritage, but we try to live the American life. Because that’s where we are, in the US. Just because we are here, there are some Finnish traditions that are just a part of us.
John, 90-94

Although there are not many first generation Finnish Americans left anymore, the pride of having Finnish roots is still strong

(Korkiasaari 2015: 48). At least among my informants the pride of having Finnish ancestry was voiced in many interviews. All of my informants had positive thoughts about their Finnish heritage, even though I know that there are people who do not want to be recognized as Finnish Americans or their ethnic heritage is not meaningful to them. Like Sarah said, people cannot choose where their ancestors are from so they can decide to embrace the heritage that they have.

5.2 Combining ethnic cultures

Different ethnic cultures are also mixed in the USA because of so many different ethnicities and their interaction. One example of mixing of cultures are pasties, which are traditionally meat-potato-rutabaga-onion-and-carrot-pies (figure 14). Originally brought to the Copper Country of Michigan in mid-1800s by miners from Cornwall in England, Finnish Americans of the area made small changes to the recipe and took pasties to their cuisine (Lockwood 2015: 198). Many people now associate pasties with Finnish American food culture. Pasties are an example of tradition in Finnish American culture but what is not known in Finland, even though some Finnish Americans do not know that pasties are not originally from Finland. Pasties are a thing mainly in Michigan — especially in the Upper Peninsula — and Sarah and Jessica were the only informants who talked about the pasty being part of the Finnish American cuisine;

Pasties but that's... I guess you don't have those in Finland. Maybe it's more in the Upper Peninsula in Michigan but I always thought that was a Finnish thing. Jessica, 20-24

I don't know how accurate that is with the pasty. I think that culture is kinda crossing, adapting, take different things and maybe make them better or to their liking... For this area a lot of people say that the pasties are Finnish. And I think that there's some question there.

Sarah, 30-34



Figure 14. Pasty served with ketchup in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Immigrants are influenced by two different world views, and the customs and values of both cultures; they can integrate cultures and mix features from the mainstream culture and their ethnic heritage (Mahalingam 2006: 2). There can be Finnish and American traditions or other ethnic traditions in Finnish American

homes — for example — in the celebration of holidays such as celebrating Christmas or having Santa Claus visit on Christmas Eve, as Michael told; “*we do Christmas and there is a Joulupukki (Santa Claus).*” Traditionally in American homes gifts are brought by Santa Claus in the night and the children do not actually see him. In the Finnish tradition Santa Claus visits the homes on Christmas Eve and gives the gifts. Mary also said that they celebrate Christmas Eve. Thomas said that they have included the tradition of Christmas sauna to their holiday. In Finland it is a tradition to go to sauna on Christmas Eve before the Christmas dinner.

Finnish Americans have kept some Finnish cultural traditions as part of their lives, but also they were influenced by other ethnicities. Sometimes they do not even know, what is in their traditions Finnish, and what is from some other ethnicity.

I don't know how much of it is Finnish and how much of it is Americanized and how it kinda gets blurry. I feel like it's nice to be part of it and you feel like at least part of it is Finnish. When I was younger I didn't know the difference. Now I kinda know little bit more of what came from where as far as traditions and things that we keep in our family... It's kinda like I don't know, what things we make at home, if it's a Finnish meal or if it's kind of a mix... It all blends in together what is American or what is... There is no line of this is from this and this is from this.

Sarah, 30-34

5.3 Ethnic identity as a process of definition

Ethnic identity is a continuous process of self-definition and self-assessment. Third or fourth generation Finnish Americans may be indifferent about their ethnic heritage when they are teenagers or young adults but as they get older the interest in family history and heritage may arise. In that case, they may be interested in learning the language, learning about ancestors and their history,

or visiting the country of their ancestors, and in that way rebuild their ethnic identity. The importance of knowing and appreciating a person's roots and heritage changes over lifetime; when people are older they may realize that keeping the roots strong and the importance of keeping traditions are enriching their lives (Šabec 2016: 80).

During my fieldwork I heard people talk about how they became more interested in their heritage when they have become older. Many times those were people who were doing genealogy and wanted to know more about their Finnish ancestors and heritage. Some of the people told me that they wish they had been more interested in the Finnish heritage when their grandparents or parents were still alive so they could have asked them directly about the immigration to the USA, where they came from in Finland and about Finnish culture and heritage. Two of my informants told about becoming more interested in their roots after meeting Finnish people or relatives.

I became interested in my heritage when I came to Finland 1983 and decided to learn some Finnish and Swedish language so that I could communicate with the elders... They left some kind of an imprint on me I guess that would make me want to stay involved in different cultural activities.

Richard, 70-74

Also, research generally suggests that adolescents and college students report stronger or more mature ethnic identity with increasing age (Phinney & Ong 2007: 54). For Sarah, the interest in Finnish culture was found in college after meeting Finnish students.

I think, when I was older in college I became more interested and meeting people through international program learning and asking.

Sarah, 30-34

Although most of my informants said that they have become more interested in their ancestry in their adulthood, it was quite

common to say that in their childhood they did not know, what was Finnish or what was American culture in their homes or in their grandparents' homes.

When you grow up you don't know that life can be any different. You don't know what it is about your life that is different from anyone else's. But I must say that when I went to Finland I could see the influence. It's the gathering in the kitchen and eating together and a sense of being close with family and friends who also were Finnish descent. To me that seemed very familiar in Finland and I could compare friends who went to school with me.
Sharon, 70-75

As a child Sharon lived in a small town with many Finnish Americans. During the interview Sharon and Michael compared Sharon's experience of growing up in a small town in a community of mainly Finnish and Swedish speaking Finns, and Michael's experience of growing up in a big city with multicultural neighborhoods and schools.

It does make a difference if a person lives in the Midwest where many of the Finns settled or in the South where there were only few Finns in the early 1900s. In Palo Stoller's (1997: 63) research geographical location had a strong influence on ethnic involvement in everyday life. Finnish Americans living in the Finnish American regions in the Midwest were more likely to incorporate Finnish American culture to their activities and homes than Finnish Americans in areas where not many Finns settled. In my fieldwork, I saw how the Finnish American influence is stronger in the Midwest compared to some other areas. For example, in Hancock Finlandia University and its Finnish American Heritage Center are central in the Finnish American community and activities. Albeit, there are many other active organizations in Michigan, but also for example in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Ohio too.

I feel like the Finnish heritage is just so embedded in this area too, so I think it's something that's always been kinda there.

It's familiar. I think Finlandia University does a really good job with bringing in people and getting that Finnish heritage out there... I feel like the Finnish heritage is almost like the one that I feel most connected to or proud of... I could be like a small percentage of it compared to the other ones but I feel like maybe it's just the area being so proud of that heritage that it's like in me.

Sarah, 30-34

Growing up in a Finnish American neighborhood or area where Finnishness is an essential part of daily life creates usually a very warm and keen relationship to one's heritage (Korkiasaari 2004: 12). But moving to or living in a non-Finnish American area can have an opposite effect. Chris and Mary both said that living in a state where there are not many Finns has affected their involvement in the Finnish American community. Chris said that if he had stayed in Washington, where there is a larger Finnish American community, it would have been easier for him to be more in contact with the culture and learn more about it.

The Finnish culture of the immigrant generation in the turn of the 20th century was not the same culture what the contemporary Finnish culture is in Finland. Of course there are same cultural attributes and heritage that was considered Finnish culture a hundred years ago and still is today, but the biggest difference is the changes in urbanization and technology (e.g. Hieta 2014: 249). In a way, the Finnish culture of the immigrant generation froze to what it was in the end of 1800s and early 1900s, due to the children of immigrants learning what is Finnish culture from their parents and the absence of large amounts of new Finnish immigrants after 1924 (Saari 2014: 6). The same happened to the language and dialects spoken by the immigrants. As Thomas explained; *"It's a distinct culture, based on the past and memories. We have our own language and ways"*, referring to the culture of the immigrant generation but also differentiating Finnish culture from other ethnic cultures in the USA. There is also less updated first-hand knowledge of the culture if third or fourth generation Finnish Americans have not been to Finland

themselves or they do not follow current news about Finland. Furthermore, the romantic appeal of Finland as an unchanging place of quaint villages and rural landscapes contributed to future misunderstandings between Finns and North Americans (Hieta 2014: 246). This has led to some tension between descendants of the Great Migration era immigrants and “newcomers” — immigrants of late 1900s and 2000s — because they have different views of what the culture and identity means (e.g. Leinonen 2014b: 310; Gabaccia 2007: 421-422).

When I was talking Finnish with Finnish Americans who had learned the language from their parents or grandparents, I could hear differences in the language and words they used compared to the Finnish that is spoken in present day Finland. Second and third generation Finnish Americans are mostly older now and not many young people speak the language. This had influenced the way Sharon thought about the Finnish culture;

I would say that at that time I sort of thought that Finland and Finnish they were all related to old people... Spending time in Finland I've realized how advanced Finland is and it really is a place to be proud to have relatives and to have your ancestors come from... I would say my being aware of being Finnish and my pride in that is more from visiting Finland and seeing what it was all about. It was amazing to see or to hear young babies and young children speaking Finnish because here it was only the older people that had either been born there or had grown up in a Finnish community.

Sharon, 70-74

Before Sharon visited Finland, her understanding of Finland and Finnish culture was influenced by the Finnish culture and society of her grandparents' generation. After being in Finland her view changed and she could appreciate her heritage more because she saw the modernized Finland of the end of 20th century. Hieta (2014: 249) also describes how many second and third generation Finnish Americans were surprised by Finland's development and

that the country did not resemble the stories they were told, but also there was disappointment about the loss of rural lifestyle.

When Finnish people immigrated to the USA they took their religion with them. Since Finnish immigrants tended to be Lutheran, one of the cultural elements of the Finnish Americans was the Finnish Lutheran Church (Susag 1998: 2). There still are Lutheran churches in the area where Finnish Americans settled, although most of them are not Finnish churches anymore. Upper Peninsula of Michigan was the center of Finnish Apostolic Lutheranism or Laestadianism (Finnish American Heritage Center 2018b). Due to the religious views, many of the Apostolic Lutherans have had many children in the families.

I don't know how common that is in Finland for Finnish to have big families, but all the Finns that I know have many, many children. And they're all pretty religious. Maybe it's also the area. And it's all Lutheran, which is the national religion in Finland so that's the common tie. Jessica, 20-24

Before Jessica was in Finland, her definition of Finnish families was that they are big and religious. Having been to Finland in 2010s, her view of Finnish families changed because in Finland it is not so common to have more than two children anymore. Many Finnish Americans who have not been to today's Finland may have an outdated definition of Finland and Finnish culture. In reality, Finland and Finnish culture has not been frozen in time to the turn of the 20th century — instead — it has been influenced by other cultures and it has evolved from agrarian society to industrialized society and to present-day information society (Kuittinen 2017).

6 Maintaining the Finnish American heritage

6.1 Finnish American organizations and events

For most of the first and second generation Finnish Americans different Finnish organizations were important part of their lives. Finnish Americans had their own churches, co-operative stores, halls, musical groups and fraternal organizations, such as The Knights of Kaleva or temperance societies (Finnish American Heritage Center 2018b). Many Finnish American clubs, newspapers and organizations have stopped their operations or have changed to be more suitable for the needs and wants of contemporary Finnish Americans. As Šabec (2016: 78) states, there is an interest among ethnic minorities in cultural events, dances and clubs but language used is mostly English, because when the older people have died, the younger people did not maintain the language skills. There still are Finnish American organizations who maintain the Finnish American culture and communities. New organizations — like Finlandia Foundation and various local historical societies — have replaced some of the old clubs (Korkiasaari 2012: 45).

Three of my informants were or had been actively involved with Finnish American organizations in their hometowns or in regional organizations. Richard was active in a Finnish dance group and supportive of other cultural organizations. He said, *“outside of dancing group I am being supportive of other things. Attending. We are not like officers in an organization.”* There are many dance groups in Finnish American communities that dance and perform traditional Finnish dances (figure 15). There are groups for adults and children. Many dance groups perform in various Finnish American events wearing traditional costumes and dancing traditional folk songs. John and Thomas were the only informants who had been very active in the Finnish American community through different organizations. John said, *“I got*

involved with a Finnish American group here, up to that point I hadn't really been involved with the Finnish community very much." He jokingly added, "My wife wasn't Finnish so I had to get her trained".



Figure 15. Finnish American dance group performing a traditional Finnish dance in an event in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Ethnic identity can vary according to the situation, because for some people ethnicity can be socially meaningful only in few situations and their identity can be affected by other factors than ethnicity (Eriksen 2004: 247). Eriksen says that to many American descendants of European immigrants their ancestry is not very socially meaningful. Ethnic identity is made visible in, for example, public rituals a few times a year, but at other times they are ordinary Americans.

For me being Finnish-American means I have pride in Finland and my Finnish heritage, but on a daily basis I am the same as any other average American. Chris, 30-34

Finnish immigrants — and their descendants — have actively tried to maintain and keep the Finnish heritage and traditions in the Finnish American communities of the USA. Probably the largest Finnish American event is FinnFest USA, which is an annual event held in a different location each year. Although the idea for FinnFest came from Finland in 1982, the first festival was held in Minneapolis in 1983 (Kero 1997: 332). In 2018 was the first time FinnFest was in Finland (FinnFest USA 2018). Traditionally FinnFest is a festival of music, dancing, plays, competitions and banquets. The aim of the festival is to keep the heritage alive but also intrigue new — later generation — Finnish Americans to learn about their heritage and to get them more interested in their Finnish ancestry. Thomas, Richard and John were the only informants who had been to FinnFest. John said that he has attended a few FinnFests. Richard told that he and his dance group put on a special performance for the FinnFest when it was held near where they live.

Finnish American clubs, organizations and historical societies around the country organize many annual cultural events — naturally most of the events are in the areas where most Finnish Americans live. Many of the events center around Christmas and Midsummer, but there are also monthly and other seasonal events — for example — Finnish movie screenings, art shows, lectures on Finnish and Finnish American history, traditional artefact exhibitions, heritage days in museums and historical societies, and workshops on traditional handicrafts. For example, during some of the festivals there have been classes on folk dancing, learning to play traditional instruments — such as *kantele* or *jouhikko*, or making handicrafts using traditional materials or methods, such as birch bark weaving (figure 16).



Figure 16. Birch bark weaving class in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Some of the communities host a Finnish Independence Day event in December. Richard explained that their dance group promote Finnish music and they do old time Finnish dancing. He said that they want to perform and attend Finnish American events “*so we’re keeping this spirit alive*”. Linda described the events in her hometown, where there is a Finnish center that hosts many of the Finnish American events of the community.

They had chicken barbeques, midsummer bonfires, everything. All Finnish traditional stuff... We have all kinds of events here, probably at least once a month... In the fall, they have a tori (market) and a number of companies that sell Finnish goods come, so we can buy Finnish stuff, like Arabia and Marimekko here. This Saturday they’re having a pannukakku breakfast. That’s once a month. And then it’s the Finnish American craft room... They have Finnish dances that they dance, all kinds of dances... They have the kesäjuhlas (summer festival) here. This is where I grew up... This was the family place to go, it still is for lot of Finns. But

now that the group that tends to go are older ones. Not as many kids.
Linda, 65-69

Tori or market are quite common in Finnish American events. In the events that I attended in Michigan there was at least Finnish chocolates, coffee, *pulla*, ryebread and little knick-knacks with Finnish symbols for sale (figure 17).



Figure 17. Finnish candy, knick-knacks and souvenirs for sale in an event in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Celebrating Midsummer has very long traditions in Finland and the Nordic countries. The Finnish American community in the Copper Country has had an annual Midsummer event for about a hundred years. The Midsummer event is currently organized by the Finnish American Heritage Center who try to bring Finnish performers and have Finnish folk culture and art classes around the weekend. In the Midsummer event there is a dance and a bonfire (*kokko*) on a beach on Lake Superior (figure 18). The event has same elements as Midsummer festivities in Finland;

bonfire is very popular tradition and Midsummer dances (*juhannustanssit*) are commonly organized in Finland. Although I heard that for some it is not about the Finnish heritage but gathering with family and spending time together. However, I would argue that for some it must be also about the Finnish American heritage and I saw some people dressed in t-shirts and hats with Finnish flags or Finnish texts on them. So people do want to bring out their Finnishness in these public events and in that way show their connection to the Finnish American community and heritage.



Figure 18. Juhannuskokko (midsummer bonfire) in Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

Most of my informants had been to at least some kind of Finnish American event. Again, the area where they live had a significant influence on how much they participate in the events. The informants who did not live in or near Finnish American

communities had not attended many or any events. The ones that were living where events are held were more involved in attending different kinds of Finnish American events. In Michigan and Minnesota Finnish American events are usually only Finnish American, but in — for example — Washington many of the events are held together with other Nordic cultural organizations. As Richard said, “*Generally on midsummer we do a Scandinavian midsummer event and it involves people with the associations of the Nordic countries*”. Also John told about an ethnic event they have;

We have a couple of public events. We have one in the park where we adjoin with the Swedish lodge and we promote different nationalities that are in the area, and of course we are promoting ours.
John, 90-94

Finnish Americans have also events that are not commonly celebrated in the contemporary Finnish culture in Finland. *Heikinpäivä* in January is an example of these kinds of events. *Heikinpäivä* or *Heikki Lunta* is a winter festival in Upper Peninsula of Michigan (Rankinen 2014). According to the Finnish Foundation National (2018) it was created in Hancock in 1999. That might explain why it is not known in other Finnish American communities in other parts of the USA, and Sarah and Thomas were the only informants who talked about *Heikinpäivä*. It is celebrated as a mid-winter festival and named after Henrik, the patron saint of Finland — nicknamed Heikki — whose name day is on 19th January.

Heikinpäivä festivities are also a mix of Finnish and American cultural traditions. In the USA parades are a common part of different kinds of festivals or holidays. *Heikinpäivä* has its own parade in Hancock, Michigan;

What’s that one where you scare away winter... Heikinpäivä. So that’s fun when there is the parade for that... I didn’t know what it was until I was an adult. Once I learned what it was, I

*was like ooh, part of our Finnish culture and I like that.
That's fun.* Sarah, 30-34

For the parade, people dress in national costumes or other kind of winter- or Finland-related costumes, and different Finnish American organizations represent their activities (figure 19). There has even been a reindeer marching in the parade. The day also includes a *tori* and a polar bear plunge — going for a swim in the frozen lake.



Figure 19. Heikinpäivä parade in 2012 in Hancock, Michigan (City of Hancock 2012).

Finnish Americans have also created new traditions that were not brought from Finland by the immigrants and which are now in many places considered very Finnish American. According to Lockwood (2012: 49) invented traditions include new folklore created out of fiction with no precedent in Finland. For example, Saint Urho was invented in 1950s in Minnesota as a humorous

protest to Saint Patrick's Day of the Irish people but which is celebrated widely by many Americans now. Consequently a mythical Saint Urho was invented to have a day for a Finnish saint on 16th March, the day before Saint Patrick's Day. In Finland not many people know about Saint Urho — due to the fact that there is no patron saint of Finland called Urho — but in the USA many Finnish American communities celebrate Saint Urho's Day with traditional play of Urho expelling the grape destroying grasshoppers from Finland (figure 20). (Alanen 2012: 4; Lockwood 2012: 59.) St. Urho's Day is a controversial figure — due to not being traditionally a Finnish character — and there is a debate whether St. Urho should be considered a true symbol of Finnishness or not (Virtanen 2012: 76-77; Susag 1998: 8; Leinonen 2014b: 311-312). Nevertheless, many Finnish American communities celebrate the day with parades and festivities, although none of my informants say that they celebrate Saint Urho's Day.



Figure 20. St. Urho and a grasshopper in Heikinpäivä parade in 2012 in Hancock, Michigan (City of Hancock 2012).

6.2 Finnish place names

In some regions of the USA the Finnish influence may also be seen in place names. Place names are given intentionally, to convey a certain meaning, and due to these meanings the names are understood as symbols of regional culture that reflect the history, habitat and environment of a place (Radding & Western 2010). Place names — or toponyms — provide historical and cultural information on settlement patterns and allow insight into the status, character and mindset of settlers, eponyms and local residents (Fuchs 2015: 330). Every place name has a story behind it; the name was given by someone, at a particular time and for a particular reason, and sometimes the name is changed for various reasons (Tent 2015: 67). Around the USA there are place names that represent the ethnicities that colonized or still live in the area. Many European cities and towns have namesakes in the USA; for example Berlin, Vienna, Athens, Naples and Madrid.

Finnish American presence may be seen on road signs that display Finnish names in Minnesota's northern half, or the ninety or so terms that officially identify places and geographic sites (Alanen 2012: 4). Numerous toponyms throughout Michigan's Upper Peninsula reflect the Finnish ancestry and influence in the region; Finns dominated the residential neighborhoods near several of the Lake Superior region's copper and iron ore mines, with streets bearing Finnish names (Cross 2017: 291). Driving around Michigan's Upper Peninsula, I saw many road signs with Finnish names; for example, Koponen Road, Sutinen Road and Jurmu Road, or villages of Toivola, Nisula, Liminga, Paavola or Aura.

Place-based toponyms indicate regional origins, cultural ties or both; naming a place after a town in home region expresses an intrinsic need to transfer familiar and meaningful names to new environments and thus linking former and new homes and creating emotional attachment to the place (Tuan 1991). Tent (2015: 71) calls the use of toponyms from another location a shift

of place names. For example, in Minnesota places named after Finnish towns or villages are Heinola and Finland. A township called Oulu can be found in Wisconsin (figure 21). In Upper Peninsula Michigan there are Liminga (*Liminka* in Finland), Pori and Waasa.



Figure 21. Road sign welcoming to Oulu, Wisconsin (photo: Pauliina Lehto).

Eponyms are place names commemorating or honoring a person or a proper name used as a toponym (Tent 2015: 71). The names can be a marker of personal achievement — name of the settler or persons of power or influential position — or to commemorate people from the native country or early European pioneers in the area (Fuchs 2015: 335). Finnish eponyms in the USA are, for example; Nisula, Oskar and Tolonen Hill in Michigan, Waino

(*Wäinö*) and Lehto Lake in Wisconsin, as well as Esko, Makinen (*Mäkinen*) and Topelius in Minnesota. Many of these names depict the names of first settlers of the village or township. Alanen (2012: 21) also tells how Finns in Minnesota named townships after notable Finnish people Runeberg, Lonnrot (*Lönnrot*) and Snellman. Finns also named many places to commemorate the national epic of Finland *Kalevala*. Examples of these places are Kaleva and Tapiola in Michigan and Kalevala in Minnesota.

In the Finnish American regions there are also many place names that have the word Finn in them. Names like Finland, Finn Lake, Finlander Bay, Finn Creek, Finn Hill or Finn's Point can be found — for example — in Michigan, Minnesota, Washington, New York, North Dakota, Oregon and Wyoming (Genealogical Society of Finland 2019). For example, in Washington there are place names that remind of the Finnish American settlement, although the areas are no longer places where the majority of population are Finns. Michael told about the Finn Hill cemetery where many Finns have been buried;

There is a place called Finn Hill cemetery where my grandmother and grandfather are buried and other relatives too. This is just a tiny little cemetery. And if you look around the country, quite often you see places, and around Poulsbo there is a place called Finn Hill, these kind of pop up here and there. There are evidences that Finns live here.

Michael, 70-74

In Hancock, Michigan the Finnish influence in the area is visible on the main street, where the street names are in both Finnish and English (figure 22). To my understanding, the names are purely symbolic and the locals only use the English names of the streets. There are also restaurants, cafes and stores with Finnish names in the Finnish American communities. For example, there is a restaurant called the Finnish Bistro in St. Paul, Minnesota and in Houghton, Michigan *Suomi* (Finland in Finnish) restaurant. These

restaurants have Finnish foods on the menu, for example the Finnish breakfast, *pannukakku* and *nisu*, but mainly the foods are similar to any other American diner. However, the Finnish American heritage is maintained and kept as part of people's lives as well as brought out in the place names and townscapes.



Figure 22. Street signs in Hancock, Michigan (photo: Anni Arvio).

7 Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the Finnish American ethnic identity and the presence of Finnish ethnicity and cultural heritage among third and fourth generation Finnish Americans. The theoretical background is on symbolic and interpretive anthropology and Geertz's definition of culture as a shared web of meanings (Geertz 1973). This thesis gives a cultural anthropological perspective on researching ethnic identities and the cultural heritage of immigrants' descendants. My research material consists of eleven interviews of third and fourth generation Finnish Americans and field notes of ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation in Finnish American communities. I have done fieldwork in the areas where most of the Finnish immigrants settled at the turn of the 20th century and where many Finnish Americans still reside; mainly in Michigan and Minnesota, but also in Massachusetts, Washington and Oregon.

The Finnish American ethnic identity is represented symbolically, but it is also represented by kinship or family connections and material culture. I argue that the Finnish American community is connected by the symbolic idea of a nation or ethnicity and the meanings that people give to their ethnic heritage. In the Finnish American community ethnic heritage is very commonly represented in flags and other national symbols. According to my fieldwork, the concept of *sisu* is brought out when Finnish Americans want to distinguish them from other ethnic groups. *Sisu* is constructed to represent Finnish people and many Finnish Americans refer to having *sisu* when they explain what it means to be Finnish American.

Although ethnicity is referring to a person's genealogical tree and ancestors, ethnicity is also represented symbolically because even third or fourth generation Finnish Americans who might never been in Finland can have a sense of Finnish ethnic identity. In these cases, the ethnic identity is not in actual contacts with

Finland but in the symbols that represent Finland and the Finnish heritage. There are also descendants of Finns in the USA who have opted out of Finnishness and do not call them Finnish Americans. This proves that being Finnish American is not just depending on genetic makeup, but the feeling and being symbolically part of the community and heritage.

Many of the first generation Finnish Americans did not want to learn English and many of them did not even need to learn other languages. Second and third generations Finnish Americans assimilated easier to the mainstream American culture because they attended English schools where they met people from other ethnic groups or they were not allowed to speak Finnish. Most third and fourth generation Finnish Americans do not speak Finnish, even though many of them might want to. The reasons, why Finnish is not spoken anymore, are usually — according to my research data — that the language is thought to be too difficult or that there is no one to speak Finnish with after the fluent speaking first or second generation family members have passed away. In order to learn and maintain a language, it needs to be spoken and heard regularly.

Language shift does not automatically equal a loss of ethnic identity. Even though Finnish Americans may not speak Finnish, it is heard in conversations in different kinds of expressions, sayings and odd words that people use. I heard many people use Finnish idioms during my fieldwork and my informants told stories of how they have used Finnish words with their grandparents, parents or children. Finnish words are also used in many foods and dishes. The Finnish names for certain foods are used to emphasize the Finnish heritage of the food culture. Especially *pulla* or *nisu*, *pannukakku* and *leipäjuusto* are visible in menus in restaurants or cafes in the Finnish American areas and served on Finnish American events and potluck dinners.

Many Finnish Americans use material objects to represent their ethnic heritage and the belonging to the Finnish American

community. Many Finnish Americans are very fond of going to the sauna and in many places people have their own saunas either in their yard or inside their houses. Many people refer to the sauna as an important part of the Finnish culture or what represents Finnish culture to them. The Finnish heritage is visible in many Finnish Americans' homes in different kinds of items, artefacts, flags, dishes, glassware, family heirlooms and photographs. People have artefacts and knick-knacks that have Finnish symbols — such as the flag or colors of the flag, lions or texts like *sisu* — inside or outside of their homes, summer cabins and vehicles. People bring their ethnic heritage visible with these items and publicly present the pride in their ethnic heritage.

Even though Finland may be physically and genetically far from third and fourth generation Finnish Americans, many of them want to keep the Finnish heritage part of their identity. They feel like they want to be from somewhere. For many, the family connection means that they have a place for their roots and that they belong to a group of people. The very thought of people wanting to find out about their ancestors and their interest in genealogy is a strong sign of the meaning of kinship ties to Finnish Americans. Knowing the heritage of ancestors is important to many Finnish Americans and many travel to Finland to meet relatives — even if they might be quite distant relatives — to keep the contacts to people but also to see the places where their immigrant ancestors came from. Knowing the town, village or farm where the ancestors came from gives a tangible connection to the places of a person's ancestors.

Many Americans of immigrant descent want to identify themselves according to their ethnic heritage. Being just American may not be a sufficient expression of their ethnic identity. Adding the person's ethnic origin tells more specifically of their ethnic identity and who they want to identify as. The USA is a country of many ethnicities and it is common for a person to have ancestors from more than one country. How much people feel connection to their Finnish heritage, is connected to how

meaningful the Finnish heritage is to them. People may have bi- or multicultural identities and one person can identify as Finnish, Irish and Swedish American. Some may feel strong connection to the Finnish heritage because they have many grandparents from Finland or because the Finnish heritage is heavily visible in the area where they live. All of my informants said that they are proud of their Finnish heritage. Being Finnish American resonates positive feelings for them, but it is not the case for all descendants of Finnish immigrants. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview people who have negative feelings about their Finnish roots for this research.

Cultures are not static, but they are changing in time. Finland of the turn of the 20th century is not the same as what Finland is today in 2010s. Of course, there are still same traditions but the society is not the same society than when my informants' grandparents or great-grandparents immigrated to the USA. For third or fourth generation Finnish Americans it may be a surprise to visit Finland if the image of Finland is based on the narratives of their parents or grandparents. In time, Finnish language has evolved, family size has been decreased and the agrarian society has become a modern, urbanized information society.

In my fieldwork I noticed that third and fourth generation Finnish Americans are assimilated to the American mainstream culture in a sense that they are like any other average American in their daily lives. However, many Finnish Americans have a connection with their Finnish heritage and wanted to keep that connection by integrating ethnic cultural features to their lives. There are many active Finnish American organizations and clubs in the USA. Also, many annual, seasonal or monthly events help to maintain the Finnish American community active and promote the Finnish heritage. Many organizations have adapted to the needs of later generation Finnish Americans by changing their operational language to English, opening the events to anybody who is interested in the Finnish culture and heritage, and collaborating

with other ethnic groups, most often with other Nordic organizations.

The Finnish heritage is made visible in the various events in the Finnish American communities. The annual holidays of Midsummer (*Juhannus*) and Christmas (*Joulu*) bring many Finnish Americans together to celebrate the holiday in traditional ways. Smaller, local events appreciate certain Finnish cultural attributes, such as music, dancing, cuisine or handcrafts. There are dance groups who perform in the events, musicians playing traditional instruments, potluck breakfasts or dinners serving *pannukakku*, *nisu*, rye bread, *mojakka* and other Finnish delicacies, and classes to learn how to make traditional handcrafted items.

Doing this research has been a very interesting journey into Finnish American culture and the Finnish American communities. It has also raised many thoughts and questions for future research. There is a need for more anthropological and ethnographic research among ethnic groups in the USA. The Finnish American community is researched more from the historical point of view; the immigrants of the 19th and early 20th century and their children. The Finns who have immigrated after 1960s have taken with them a more modern and urbanized Finnish culture than the immigrants of the Great Migration era. Future research should study how the more recent immigrants represent and maintain their ethnic identity and heritage in their new homeland and how their definition of Finnish and Finnish American culture differs from the Finnish culture of earlier immigrants.

There are many Americans who have ancestors in Finland but who have decided not to identify as Finnish Americans. It would be an interesting research topic to study why people want to forget their ethnic heritage — being it Finnish or any other ethnicity — and why or how people choose between identities. But also, why some ethnicities are excluded from people's identity while other ethnicities are emphasized. With DNA-testing

becoming more accessible and utilized, it would be interesting to see how testing and — possibly surprising — new finds in people's ethnic roots affect how they define and represent their ethnic identities.

There are many ethnic organizations in the USA — Finnish and other ethnicities. These organizations have an influence on how active the ethnic communities are and more careful research on ethnic organizations and events — be it music, dancing or any kind of cultural activity — should be conducted. Modern technologies enable people to do genealogy and keep in contact with their relatives in different countries, but also they enable the communication between members of ethnic groups in — for example — various social media groups. A topic for future research could be how these groups help in maintaining the ethnic communities but also how people represent their ethnic heritage in communication in social media.

There are many people around the world who have had to move from their home — either voluntarily or unwillingly — to another region or country. Migrant workers, exiles, refugees, immigrants, expatriates — people living outside of their putative homeland — are very contemporary issues in many countries. These people are separated from their homeland and may live surrounded by a culture significantly different from their own culture. In the USA, immigration still is a very relevant issue, although in 2010s most immigrants come from Central and South America as well as Asia, instead of Europe. The issue of immigration is a much debated issue in the USA at the moment. Understanding diverse ethnic cultures is important in the USA but also researching the relationships between the ethnic groups and how they interact with each other. In this research I have focused only on the Finnish Americans heritage and identity. Nevertheless, most Americans have ancestors in many different countries and many immigrants and their descendants are transnationals and identify as bi- or multicultural. Researching how multiethnic identities are constructed and represented as well as how the ethnic cultures are

maintained in diaspora are currently important research subjects but also in the future.

Many Americans, who are descendants of immigrants, identify not only as Americans, but also as their ethnic heritage — Finnish being one of them. Being Finnish American adds to people's positive self-image and can be seen as culturally enriching. Being Finnish American does not depend on speaking the language fluently or visiting Finland frequently, but the identity is represented symbolically, in artefacts, kinship connections, events and holidays. Finnish American culture appears to be strong in the areas of largest Finnish American population. There are Finnish American organizations that maintain the culture, and the heritage and culture are brought out in various Finnish American or Nordic events across the USA. Many Americans are seeking for their roots and heritage, finding out about their family history and defining what their ethnic heritage is by doing genealogy and taking DNA-tests. As John said; *“I think everyone needs to keep looking somewhat back on where their family came from and learn little bit about their background. I think it's good for the whole world to know about each other and in the USA we have a number of different kind of people. We have to learn how to live with them. And that's what we need to do for the world — learn to live and learn to respect each other.”*

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Research material

Interviews

Chris, age group 30-34, born in Washington, lives in Idaho, interviewed 5.4.2018

Jessica, age group 20-24, born and lives in Michigan, interviewed 2.12.2015

John, age group 90-94, born in North Dakota, lives in Washington, interviewed 24.5.2016

Linda, age group 65-69, born and lives in Massachusetts, interviewed 11.5.2016

Mary, age group 60-64, born in Washington, lives in Idaho, interviewed 23.3.2018

Michael, age group 70-74, born in New Jersey, lives in Washington, interviewed 14.5.2016

Richard, age group 70-74, born and lives in Washington, interviewed 2.7.2015

Sarah, age group 30-34, born and lives in Michigan, interviewed 1.10.2018

Sharon, age group 70-74, born and lives in Washington, interviewed 14.5.2016

Thomas, age group 60-64, born and lives in Michigan, interviewed 12.3.2019

William, age group 60-64, born and lives in Washington, interviewed 21.5.2016

Other research data

Fieldnotes & research diary. 2.-28.5.2016. Massachusetts, Washington.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.

Interview questions

Background

Year and place of birth?

How many generations has your family lived in North America?

Life history

Family history, place of residence, memories related to Finland, school/work, hobbies/leisure time

Finland

How many times visited Finland?

Purpose of visit (reunion...)

Who have you visited?

Where did you go? (Ancestor's graves, places of residence...)

Do you keep contact with Finland? With relatives/friends?

Who has told you about Finland, have you found out yourself?

Do you think it's important to know about Finland or your family's history?

Language

Do you speak Finnish?

Did/does someone in your family speak Finnish?

Would you like to learn? Why do you want to learn/Why not?

Identity

What do you consider American-Finnish?

Are you American, Finnish or American-Finnish?

In what situation your Finnish heritage is emphasized/stands out?

Was Finnish heritage visible in your childhood home? Was it favored or hidden?

Do you want to tell your children about Finnish roots/heritage?

Finnish heritage

What represents Finland/Finnish culture to you? What is typical Finnish?

Are there Finnish traditions in your family that you cherish?

Do you want to sustain Finnish traditions?

Food (Do you know traditional foods, do you cook them?)

Festivities/Celebrations (vappu, FinnFest, Christmas, midsummer...)

Have you attended/would you like to attend?

Home

Finnish items/objects? Souvenirs, inherited from family member?

Finnish symbols? (Flag, family symbols...)